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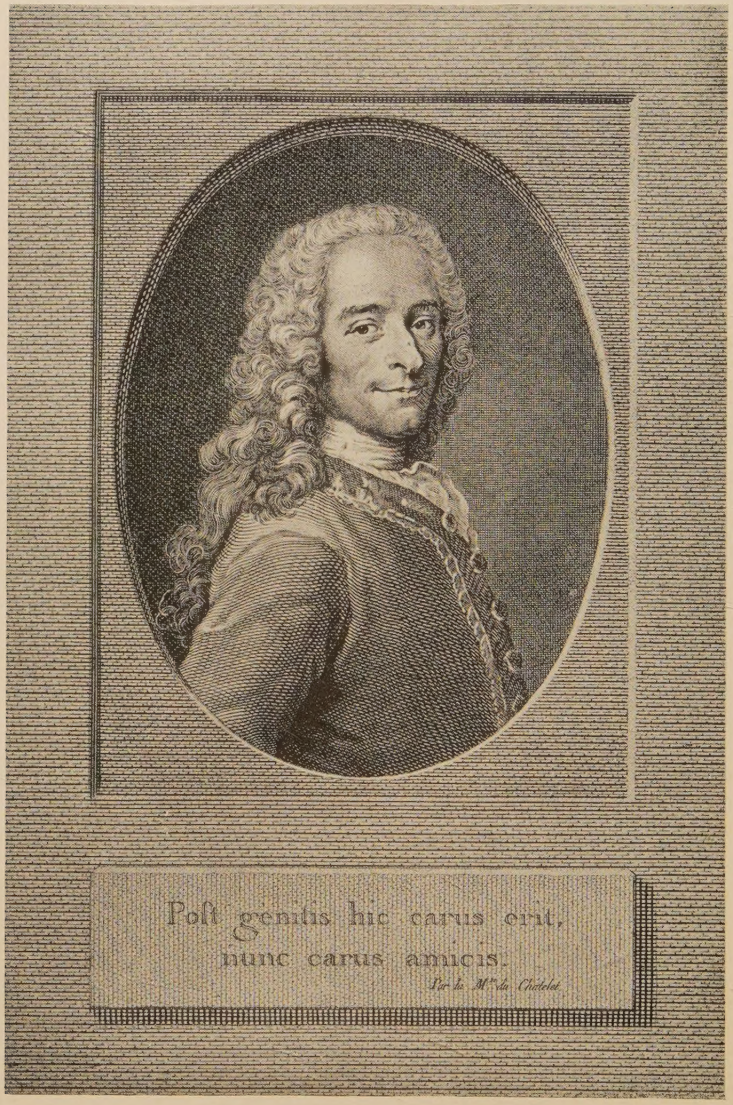

VOLTAIRE AS A YOUNG MAN

From the portrait by de la Tour

Voltaire in His Letters

Being

A Selection from His Correspondence

Translated

With a Preface and Forewords

By

Hall, E.B.

S. G. Tallentyre

Author of "The Life of Voltaire," "The Friends of Voltaire," etc.

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"Laisser le crime en paix, c'est s'en rendre complice"

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PREFACE

"It seems to me," said George Eliot, "much better to read a man's own writings, than to read what others say about him, especially when the man is first-rate and the others third-rate."

In these words lie perhaps the best reason for a translation of the Letters of Voltaire.

Traduttore traditore is certainly truth as well as truism; but there are still thousands of highly educated people who, reading for pleasure and recreation, never read any language but their own; while there are as many more, to whom French is a second mother tongue, who would never for themselves explore the eighteen large volumes (each of five to six hundred pages of close print) which contain the correspondence of Voltaire, and discard from it those letters on which time has set his defacing hand, which deal with events which once seemed as momentous as they now seem trivial, and which even a style, matchless in irony, gaiety, wit, can quicken no more; and from among those grey ashes of old fires sift out the living embers which glow and burn for ever.

Yet they are worth the search. There are many respects in which Voltaire is the best, as he is the most voluminous, of all great letter-writers.

Good letters, in any language, will be most often found to be written by persons living quiet and uneventful lives, whose range was narrow, and who lived rather in books and dreams than in the world. Witness Cowper's "divine chit-chat" to the accompaniment of the bubble of Mrs. Unwin's tea-urn and the click of her knitting needles, or to the hum of bees over his mignonette and the song of his linnets. Witness too Mme. de Sevigné's exquisite babble of affection for her daughter; Edward Fitzgerald's delightful cultivated gossip from his country town; Mrs. Carlyle's trenchant wit on her maidservants and white-washers; and the delicate thoughtfulness of the brief correspondence of the poet Gray. Gray's friend, Horace Walpole, was indeed himself a part of history and his famous Letters are no small contribution to it, yet it is chiefly the petty spites of political cliques and the scandals of the high life of his day on which he enlightens us. Byron —one of the best, because one of the most natural, of correspondents—managed to write reams of letters through some of the most thrilling events in the history of our race without making half a

dozen allusions to them. But Voltaire was not only contemporaneous with almost the whole of one of the most remarkable centuries of history —born in 1694 he did not die until 1778—but himself from first to last played a great rôle in this century, and was palpitatingly alive to the very finger-tips to its importance and its possibilities—to everything that made it shameful and to everything that made it glorious.

He was the personal friend of one monarch, the servant and courtier of a second, the adviser and correspondent of a third; and, unlike Horace Walpole and Fanny Burney, though he flattered kings to the top of their bent, he put them, not the less, in their proper place in his scheme of things. For he knew, and appreciated at their true worth, men with a nobler title to fame: he was intimate in life or on paper with most of the great men of letters and of the social reformers of his day: had met Pope, Swift, Bolingbroke: loved Diderot, who produced the great Encyclopædia, and d'Alembert, who introduced it: appreciated the faithful and delicate work of Vauvenargues, and the noble efforts for oppressed humanity of Turgot and of Condorcet. Then too he was not only an observer of, but an active participator in, some of the greatest *causes célèbres* of the time: in the cases of the Calas and of the Sirvens:

of Admiral Byng and of General Lally, and of the Chevalier de la Barre.

But at this moment, paramount in interest perhaps to the rest of his correspondence is that part of it which deals with Frederick the Great, for the resemblance, often insisted on, between the present Emperor of Germany and his greater ancestor is strikingly set forth in those Letters of Voltaire which present the tragi-comedy of their ill-omened friendship. In them we have reincarnate a Prince who, like his successor, was for ever courting the limelight: who had what, for want of a better phrase, may be called the religious pose—only, while Frederick sat for the portrait of the daring Freethinker, William "has God for ever on his tongue." In the great Frederick of Voltaire's correspondence may be seen clearly that strain of madness inherited from his madder sire and bequeathed, together with an exceeding cleverness, to the present representative of the house. The Frederick Voltaire portrays had, like his descendant, "omniscience as his foible": "fiddled and fought as well as any man in Christendom": posed as flute-player, French poet and *littérateur* as well as king and conqueror: and, where William "dropped the pilot" in politics, Voltaire's correspondence unfolds the cynic story of William's forbear who, in literature and

friendship, made use of guest and friend till he was weary of him and having "squeezed the orange, threw away the peel."

The Letters further draw attention to that delusion of infallibility which had sunk deep into the soul of Frederick as into the soul of William: and show that that "place in the sun" equally coveted by both became to one as to the other "le commencement et l'image de l'usurpation de toute la terre."

It was Frederick who staunchly advocated peace—until he was perfectly ready for war, when he tore up the scraps of paper called treaties, broke faith with Maria Theresa, invaded Silesia and plunged Europe into one of the bloodiest conflicts in history.

"No man ever wore better than Frederick the Great the fine coat called Culture. He fitted it so well that even a shrewd Voltaire thought it his skin, not his covering," until "he flung it on the ground and trampled on it." The writer may be forgiven for quoting these words from a *Life of Voltaire*, written fifteen years ago, as showing that the points of likeness between Frederick and the present representative of his house, far from being fanciful or far-fetched, literally *sautent aux yeux*.

It is not a little satisfactory to gather from

chinery: that its parts have been polished and repolished with a skill and patience so admirable that at last they need nothing but the highest art of all—to conceal art.

But Voltaire had a fecundity of inspiration—good measure, pressed down and running over—which allowed him to be at all times perfectly spontaneous: and one of the most cunning minds in the most artificial age in the history of the world, is not the less one of the most easy and natural of its letter-writers.

No need for him to make rough copies of his correspondence: to repeat and re-dress his good stories and his *bon-mots*, as Horace Walpole repeated and re-dressed his: for when he had laid aside his *Pucelle* or his *Candide* to write—in his minute handwriting, on the back of a playing card perhaps—an invitation to supper, Voltaire had wit left over and to spare; and had within him, and knew he had, wells of observation and interest so inexhaustible that he was no more afraid to draw upon them for a stupid fat niece or an old blind woman than for Frederick, the great king, or for d'Alembert, the great geometrician.

Easy writing indeed is very often "curst hard reading," but Voltaire's letters are light as gossamer: when they deal with difficult subjects, they have the perfect lucidity which was one of the

great characteristics of his mind, and which once evoked the slighting criticism, "Voltaire expressed everybody's thoughts better than anybody." But the truth is rather that he expressed complex things so clearly that his readers do not realise how complex they were—before he illuminated them.

Even metaphysics—which he himself defined as "Fine names, that nobody can explain, for what nobody can understand"—he made amusing: and though, as a rule, the reader certainly does well to decline to read, for enjoyment, eighteenth century writers moralising on Fate, Freewill and innate Vice and Virtue, it is not too much to say that, even on these subjects, Voltaire is entertaining.

Yet here lies his weakness as well as his strength. In letters—as in fiction—as in all writing—"there must be a man behind the book." Through Voltaire's letters there looks out the man who had no reverence: his tongue was so often in his cheek that when he is grave, ay, and even tender in his gravity, one still suspects the sneer: and if that be unjust (and when he deals with the subjects which moved and horrified his soul—the case of Calas, the case of Sirven, the case of La Barre—it is unjust) here, not the less, is the man born ironical, to whom satire was the weapon

with which he defended innocence and righted wrong, as well as the weapon with which he attacked, through the Christianity of Roman Catholicism as he knew it, some of the most sacred mysteries of men's souls.

Yet, satirist, mocker, giber, as he was, not the less his letters show him hot humanitarian, wise philanthropist and advanced social regenerator.

"The worst of good people is that they are such cowards," he said himself. Well, he was none! Who can fancy a Voltaire (who never failed to fly, in the teeth of his own interests and safety, at the throat of robbery and wrong committed by his own government) looking on as a passive neutral, cautiously dumb, at atrocities such as have been perpetrated in this twentieth century in Belgium, Poland, Serbia, Armenia, under the express direction of a Power calling itself Christian? With what a trembling agony of rage would the soul and genius of that little withered sceptic have denounced and held up such deeds to eternal execration; for, blasphemer as he could be, he not only knew that "right is right, and to follow right were wisdom in the scorn of consequence," but was never too timid or too cautious to act on his knowledge.

Though the French in which his Letters are written is perfectly supple, simple and luminous,

it is not easy to translate well. The irony is so very delicate that there is real danger of its being in translation entirely obscured: the points of the keen little arrows of malicious wit, with which Voltaire pierced his foes, are always and necessarily somewhat blunted by their rendering in a clumsier tongue. Voltaire reveals his nationality in every stroke of the pen; and the translator, in Anglicising his speech, must needs beware lest he also Anglicise the soul of one of the most typical, as he was one of the most original, of the sons of France. Voltaire himself said that "he who is capable of making a good translation rarely amuses himself by translating": there is ample evidence of the truth of that saying in every bookshelf, and the present translator does not pretend to be an exception to it; but he does claim an intimacy and sympathy with the life, works and character of the great Frenchman that make a right judgment of his meaning at least a strong probability.

His Letters are undoubtedly the most indispensable of all his works for his biography, and in themselves form an admirable autobiography. The present ones have been chosen, in part at least, for this autobiographical character: they are in fact, as in title, not "The Letters of Voltaire" but "Voltaire in his Letters": those are given

which best portray the man "in his habit as he lived," and which are not only characteristic of his extraordinary mind, but show him in love and in prison, recovering from smallpox, lamenting a mistress, visiting a king, righting human wrongs, attacking inhuman laws, belittling Shakespeare and belauding Chesterfield; Voltaire, at four-and-twenty, as Largillière painted him, ardent, impressionable, brilliantly beginning the world—or, as Houdon carved him, triumphantly ending it, the most celebrated man in Europe and the greatest intellectual power of his generation, *anathema* to the Church and yet, said Jowett, having done more good than all the Fathers of it put together.

The translator has throughout avoided footnotes—those "signs of weakness and obscurity"—and has put the occasion, history and elucidation of each letter into a Foreword, which at least does not interrupt the text, and thus can be easily skipped by the reader who prefers to find out his author's meaning and allusions for himself. In the Forewords the translator has gone throughout on the principle of, Better too little than too much; that is, Better no light on an occasional dark place than explanations of the obvious.

The *place* the Letters were written from is given when it is known to the translator, even when

it is not given by Voltaire himself: and the letters are, of course, arranged chronologically. The whole of each is generally given: where it is not given, the omission is simply due to the fact that the writer turns aside to subjects which are no longer of interest.

For the benefit of those who are not acquainted with the broad facts of the Voltairean history, the following brief epitome of his life is subjoined.

François Marie Arouet was born in (or possibly near) Paris on November 21, 1694, and was the son of a notary. He was educated at the Jesuit College of St. Louis-le-Grand, and at nineteen, having announced to his irate parent that he proposed to live by his pen, was sent to the Hague as attaché to the French ambassador to the Netherlands. Here he fell in love with Mdlle. Dunoyer, and was shipped home as a *mauvais sujet:* wrote *Œdipe*, his first play; and in 1717 found himself in the Bastille for two satires on the Regent Orléans which he had not written. Here he changed his name to Voltaire, and began his famous epic poem, the *Henriade*. In 1718 his *Œdipe* was produced, and made its author the fashion. In 1723 he published the *Henriade*, which was instantly suppressed by the censor. Not the less, its author became *persona grata* and writer of plays and *divertissements* at the court of Louis

XV and his bride, Marie Leczinska, until 1726, when he again found himself in the Bastille for a supposed insult to the Chevalier de Rohan. From there he was exiled, at his own request, to England: a visit on which he made the acquaintance of all the great Englishmen of the day, and which produced his famous *English Letters* and inspired in him a lifelong and passionately reiterated admiration for British tolerance, liberty and justice. On his return to France he produced *Zaïre*, one of the most moving and popular of his plays. In 1734 the appearance in Paris of the *English Letters*—too free in thought for the French authorities—compelled him to fly the capital. He took refuge at Cirey in Champagne, the country house of the Marquis and the famous Marquise du Châtelet, herself a brilliantly intellectual woman, who was for fifteen years the mistress of Voltaire as her château of Cirey was his home. There he wrote with her the *Elements of Newton's Philosophy*, and continued the *Pucelle*, his ribald epic on Joan of Arc. From there he paid flying visits to Prince Frederick, afterwards Frederick the Great of Prussia; and stabbed and slew with his pen many a critic and enemy left behind in the capital—notably Desfontaines, abbé, journalist and traitor.

In 1746, being then fifty-two years old, Voltaire

was made a member of the French Academy. Two years later, Mme. du Châtelet betrayed him for the Marquis de Saint Lambert, and, in 1749, died at Lunéville, the court of Stanislas, once King of Poland. Frederick the Great's artful patronage of a minor poet—d'Arnaud—decided Voltaire to accept the royal offer of a place and pension at Potsdam, which he had hitherto wisely and firmly declined. From 1750 to 1753 he spent there one of the most harassing periods of his stormy life: engaged, and enraged his royal host by engaging, in a lawsuit with a Jew money-lender of Berlin; fought Maupertuis, president of the Berlin Academy, and finally fell upon him in *The Diatribe of Dr. Akakia*, one of the most scathing and burning satires in literature. The king had taken the part of his president: was furiously enraged with his guest, and yet refused to let him leave his dominions. After a hundred annoyances from Prussian officialdom, Voltaire succeeded in escaping it, but could not seek his own country on account of the ill-timed appearance of his *Essay on the Manners and Mind of Nations*, that "history of the human mind" which attacked tyranny on the throne and in the cowl, "offended every powerful class and every cherished prejudice," and caused Louis XV to turn to Mme. de Pompadour with "I do not wish Voltaire to return

to Paris." He went, therefore, to Switzerland: and first at the Délices and then at Ferney, both near Geneva, made his power felt through his pen, and became, as he said himself, the "innkeeper of Europe."

During his stay in Prussia he had produced, for his amazing fecundity, very little: but his history, the *Century of Louis XIV*, had appeared, and he had begun his *Philosophical Dictionary*. The fearful earthquake at Lisbon in 1755 wrung from him one of the most heartfelt of his poems, that on the *Disaster of Lisbon*. In it he attacked the easy optimism of Pope's "whatever is, is right," and through the horrors and sorrows of the world, "felt for a God" as he had felt for Him in his *Poem on Natural Law*.

In 1756 the unjust condemnation of the British Admiral Byng for the part he had played in the conquest of Minorca by the French, first stirred him to the noblest work of his life—the defence of innocence and the redressing of human wrong.

In 1759 there appeared that one of his works which is perhaps the most undying, the mocking romance of *Candide*, which "withered by a grin" that "all for the best in the best of worlds" theory which he had so seriously and passionately refuted in his poems on the *Disaster of Lisbon* and

on *Natural Law*, which had now been publicly burnt by the hangman.

In 1756 had begun Voltaire's connection with the great *Encyclopædia* and his closer friendship with d'Alembert, its promoter: in 1757 appeared its article on "Geneva," which Voltaire had certainly inspired, and which, declaring, as it did, that Calvinism was but Socinianism after all, and making out a strong case in favour of play-acting, set the city by the ears, and for a while made Voltaire's position in it nearly untenable. It was at this date that he formulated his battle-cry, *Écrasez l'infâme—l'infâme* meaning, if it can be translated by any one word, intolerance, but particularly the religious intolerance which traduced, persecuted, burnt, in the name of Christ.

In 1760 Voltaire adopted the great-niece of the famous Corneille, and by editing her uncle's works provided her with a *dot*. A year later, this most versatile of human creatures was building a church, which still stands (with its famous inscription, *Deo erexit Voltaire*) in his garden at Ferney. In 1762 he undertook to prove the innocence of Jean Calas, Protestant, of Toulouse, broken on the wheel for the supposed murder of his son: worked feverishly at the case in the teeth of every difficulty and opposition for more than three years: wrote, with the Calas case as his text, his famous *Treat-*

ise on Tolerance; and was at last rewarded by the legal declaration of the innocence of Jean Calas and of his whole family. The "advocate of lost causes," as he called himself, soon found more work to his hand; wept, clamoured, and strove for the revision of a savage sentence against another Protestant family, the Sirvens: and to establish the innocence of the young Chevalier de la Barre, who had been first tortured and then beheaded at Abbeville for an offence which, as Voltaire himself said, "deserved Saint Lazare." With the body of La Barre was burnt the first volume of the *Philosophical Dictionary*, one of the most original and brilliant of Voltaire's works—an encyclopædia in little—gay, witty, daring, profound—already anathematized in Rome and Paris, and in its fifth edition in liberal London.

Voltaire was now growing an old man, but, with his niece, Mme. Denis, as châtelaine, he continued to receive as his guests at Ferney most of the celebrities of Europe. In 1767, moved by the condition of the poor on his estate, he started a colony of watchmakers and weavers: and finding there fifty starving persons, left a flourishing and self-supporting colony of twelve hundred.

In 1773, being now seventy-nine years old, he put all his undimmed energies into assisting young Lally-Tollendal to vindicate the memory

of his father, General Lally, the Irish Jacobite, who in 1766 had been beheaded in Paris for no other crime than the failure of his efforts in India against the British on behalf of France, his adopted country.

When Voltaire was eighty-three years old, he yielded to the foolish and flattering persuasions of his niece and many admirers to visit the capital he had not seen for twenty-eight years. That triumphal progress killed him. He attended a gala performance of his last play, *Irène*, and received ovations from the French Academy and the Academy of Science, and on May 30, 1778, died, smothered by the roses of popular applause and recognition.

Fearing the authorities of the capital would deny this trenchant unbeliever a Christian burial, his relatives hurriedly conveyed his body to Scellières, where the full rites of the Church were accorded to it. Thirteen years later, in the Revolution, his ashes were transferred to the Pantheon, attended by a procession of a hundred thousand persons, preceded by bands and music. On the sarcophagus was written: "He avenged Calas, La Barre, Sirven, and Montbailli. Poet, philosopher, historian, he gave a great impetus to the human mind: he prepared us to become free."

To those lines of noble simplicity it may be

pertinently added that he not only prepared men for freedom, but that he fought for them tooth and nail against that brutal lust for domination which has drowned the world in blood to-day: and that his love of liberty, peace, tolerance, justice, and mercy breathes not only in his works, but in these his Letters, and constitutes their claim to remembrance.

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Voltaire in His Letters

I

ARRANGING AN ELOPEMENT

To Mdlle. Dunoyer

[At the date of this letter, François Marie Arouet, afterwards Voltaire, was nineteen. Having announced to his father his intention of living by his pen, he was sent to the Hague as attaché to the French Ambassador to the Netherlands, the Marquis de Châteauneuf. There he fell in love with Mdlle. Dunoyer—familiarly "Pimpette"—the daughter of a mother both impecunious and *déclassée*. Voltaire's love-letters show the ardour, the quick vivacity, the resourcefulness, and the audacity which belonged to his temperament from the cradle to the grave: and serve to prove his own aphorism, "Love is the strongest of all the passions because it attacks at once the head, the heart, and the body." The excitement

and delightfulness of *this* passion were increased fourfold by the active disapproval of the Ambassador and of Pimpette's mother—the Ambassador going so far as to imprison his attaché, on parole, which he broke, climbed out of the window, and *did* fly with Pimpette "*like the wind*," as the letter proposes, to five-mile distant Scheveningen, where she wrote, under his direction, the "*necessary letters*" intended to help the scheme of further elopement to Paris.]

THE HAGUE, 1713.

I am here as the King's prisoner. They may rob me of my life, but not of my love for you, my dearest. I will see you to-night, though it bring my head to the block. For God's sake, do not write to me in so sombre a vein: live, and be cautious: beware of your mother as your most dangerous enemy: beware of everyone, trust nobody: be ready when the moon rises; I shall leave this house incognito, shall take a coach or a chaise, and we will fly like the wind to Scheveningen. I will bring ink and paper, and we will write the necessary letters. But if you love me, take heart: summon all your resolution and coolness: keep strict watch on yourself in your mother's presence: try to get hold of your portrait: rely on my devotion, at any cost. Nothing can part

us: our love is founded on esteem and will only die with our life. You had better tell the shoemaker to order the chaise—no, on second thoughts I had rather you did not trust him: I will wait for you at the end of your road. Goodbye: all I risk for you is nothing: you are worth infinitely more. Goodbye, my dear heart.

AROUET.

II

THE COURSE OF TRUE LOVE

To Mdlle. Dunoyer

[Five days after writing this letter, Arouet was despatched back to Paris and to his father, as incorrigible.]

THE HAGUE, December 13, 1713.

I only heard yesterday, my dear, that you were ill—as a result of all the worry I have given you. Alas! that I should be at once the cause of your sufferings and powerless to relieve them! I have never felt so keen a grief—and I have never so thoroughly deserved one: I do not know what is the matter with you: everything adds to my fears: you love me, and do not write to me—I know

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from that you must be really ill. What a melancholy position for two lovers to be in!—one in bed, the other a prisoner. I should implore you to get better, if you had it in your power to do me that favour: but at least you can take care of yourself, and that is the greatest pleasure you can give me. I believe I have begged you in every letter I have ever written to you to take care of your dear health. I could bear all my own misfortunes joyfully if you could get the better of yours. My departure is again postponed. M. de M——, who has forced himself into my room, forbids me to go on writing. Goodbye, goodbye, my dear heart! May you be as happy for ever as I am miserable now! Goodbye, my dear; try to write to me.

AROUET.

III

THE END OF A PASSION

To Mdlle. Dunoyer

[Directly he was back in Paris, the lover brought all his fervid energies to bear on a scheme for getting Pimpette there, through the agency of

the Jesuits—a lost Protestant lamb for the Roman fold. This scheme was nipped in the bud by old Arouet obtaining a *lettre-de-cachet* for his scapegrace. In a year or two Pimpette became the Countess of Winterfeld: and some years later still her mother, an unscrupulous person who lived by her wits, published some of the famous Voltaire's letters to her daughter. This letter, which is the last one extant of Voltaire's to his first love, bears some evidence that his affections were cooling: and ampler evidence that Pimpette's had cooled first.]

February 10, 1715.

My dear Pimpette: Every post you miss writing to me makes me imagine that you have not received my letters, for I cannot believe that absence can have an effect on you which it never can have on me, and as I shall certainly love you for ever, I try to convince myself that you still love me. Tell me two things: first, if you have received my two last letters, and if your heart is still mine: and be sure to say if you have received my last letter which I wrote on January 20th, in which I was rash enough to mention by name the Bishop of Evreux and other persons: tell me this definitely in your reply: above all, I implore you to let me know how you are and

how things go with you: address your letter to M. le Chevalier de Saint-Fort, at M. Alain's near the Place Maubert. Write me a longer letter than this one. It will always give me more pleasure to read four pages of yours than you take in reading two lines of mine.

AROUET.

IV

ON BEING LIBERATED FROM THE BASTILLE

To the Lieutenant of Police

[In 1717, Arouet, now one and twenty and beginning to be known as a man of letters, was held responsible for two stinging satires—which he had not written—on the evil state of France and on the evil life of the Regent Orléans: and was put in the Bastille—an experience which all literary men of his time and country went through as certainly as children go through measles, and, sometimes, with no more suffering. Allowed pens and ink, as well as friends, good food, and wine, Arouet employed his leisure in conceiving and beginning his epic poem, the *Henriade*, and

THE REGENT ORLEANS

From the portrait by Crépy

in changing his name to Voltaire. In April, 1718, he was released from the Bastille and exiled to Châtenay (the paternal home) before being allowed to return to Paris. This letter is notable for the extreme agility with which the writer catches the Lieutenant of Police and the Regent in a net of gratitude for past favours—to assure himself of more to come: and for the fact that, if Voltaire had not satirized the Regent, he was perfectly aware, for all his flattering protestations, that his character was remarkably corrupt in an age when in high places corruption was rather the rule than the exception.]

CHÂTENAY, GOOD FRIDAY,
April 5, 1718.

Sir: The first use I must make of my liberty is to write and thank you for having given it to me. I can only prove my gratitude by being worthy of the kindness you have done me, and of your protection. I believe that I have profited by my misfortunes, and can assure you that I am not less grateful to the Regent for my captivity than for my freedom. I have committed many faults, but I beg you, sir, to assure his Royal Highness that I never was so wicked nor so foolish as to have written anything against him. I have never spoken of him but in terms of admiration

for his genius: and I should have expressed myself as warmly had he been a private person. I have always respected him the more because I know that he dislikes flattery as much as he deserves it. I know that in this respect you are like him, but still I cannot refrain from telling you how fortunate I think myself to be in your power, and how sure I am that you will use it to my advantage.

With the profoundest respect, I am, sir, your most humble, obedient servant,

AROUET.

V

ON AN ATTACK OF SMALLPOX

To the Baron de Breteuil

[In 1723, Voltaire, when a guest in the country house of his friend, M. de Maisons, at St. Germain's, developed smallpox. This letter has a curious interest in its revelation of the medical science, and ignorance, of the day—especially in reference to the treatment and the (supposed) course of the then most inevitable of all diseases—and in showing Voltaire's (comparative) enlightenment on the subject. For this was the epoch when

men died like flies, not from disease, but from the doctor, and when Dr. Tronchin, one of the few wise medical men of the age, had crystallised his professional advice into the phrase, "Dare to do nothing; fear the physicians more than the disease." Even in smallpox, Voltaire dared to do—almost—nothing, and so saved a frail body and one of the most vigorous minds in history for another five and forty years of Herculean labours. It will be noticed that, apparently, no disinfection of the sick room was attempted, so that the fire which accidentally destroyed it was a blessing in disguise.

The Baron de Breteuil, to whom this letter is addressed, was the father of the brilliant woman (in 1723 she was a little girl) who became Mme. du Châtelet and the mistress of Voltaire.

The "*poem*" to which Voltaire regretted he had not put the finishing touches was the *Henriade*.

"*Mariamne*" was his first tragedy, which he had brought to Maisons to read to his host and fellow-guests.

"*Rabel's water*," or *Aqua rabelliana*, was the specific of the quack Rabel. The Countess of Kent's, Vauseger's, and Aignan's remedies were of course all quack specifics also.

"*Thieriot*" (or *Thériot*) had been Voltaire's fellow-clerk when Voltaire was for a brief space—to please

his father—in a solicitor's office, and became a lifelong—though not always a faithful—friend.]

December, 1723.

In accordance with your wishes, sir, I will try and give you a faithful account of my attack of smallpox, of its very unusual treatment, and of the accident at Maisons which long prevented my regarding my recovery as a blessing.

M. de Maisons and I were both indisposed on November 4th, but, happily, the disease confined itself to me. We were both bled: he got better, and I developed smallpox. A slight rash appeared after two days of fever. I insisted on being bled a second time, in spite of the general prejudice against this course. M. de Maisons kindly sent M. de Gervasi (the Cardinal de Rohan's doctor) to me the following day. He came very unwillingly, as he was reluctant to undertake a case of smallpox in a delicate patient in whom the rash had been out for two days, and to whom the treatment given had been merely bleeding, without purgatives.

However, he came, and found me in a high fever. At first he thought very seriously of my case: the servants guessed his unfavourable opinion, and took very good care to let me know it.

They also told me that the curé of Maisons, who had made enquiries after me, was not afraid of smallpox, and wished to see me if convenient: so I had him in, and made my confession; and my will, which, as you will readily believe, was exceedingly short. After that, I calmly awaited death: only regretting that I had not put the finishing touches to my poem and to *Mariamne*, and that I must part from my friends so soon. However, M. de Gervasi never left me a minute: carefully watched nature's workings in me: never gave me anything to take without telling me the reason: allowed me to see my danger and the means of escape—his reasoning giving that trust and confidence which it is so essential a patient should have in his doctor, because the hope of cure is half the cure. He gave me emetics eight times: and, instead of the strong cordials usually recommended in this complaint, made me drink a hundred pints of lemonade. This treatment, which you will think extraordinary, was the only one which could possibly have saved my life: under any other I should most certainly have died: and I am persuaded that the majority of those whom this fearful disease has killed would be still alive had they been treated as I was.

Popular prejudice is violently opposed to bleed-

ing and purgatives in a case of smallpox: cordials and wine are always given: the patient is fed up on soups: and this ignorant treatment flourishes because some people get better in spite of it. They forget that cases which survive it are those which are without complications or danger.

Smallpox is, in a simple form, merely the blood ridding itself of its impurities, and positively paves the way to more vigorous health. Therefore, simple cases, whether they are treated with cordials or with purgatives, recover just the same.

The worst wounds, when no vital part is affected, heal naturally, whether they are kept open or treated with fomentations of wine and oil—whether Rabel's water is employed or ordinary plasters—or nothing at all. But when vital points are attacked, then all these little remedies are perfectly useless, and the cleverness of the cleverest surgeons is taxed to the uttermost: thus it is with smallpox.

When it is accompanied by malignant fever, when the vessels are so overfilled with blood as to be at the point of bursting, when the blood is about to fly to the brain, and the body is filled with bile and foreign substances which, fermenting, adversely affect the whole organism, then mere

commonsense tells us that bleeding is indispensable: it purifies the blood, relaxes the blood vessels, makes the organs work more easily and freely, opens the pores of the skin, and helps the eruption to come out: then strong medicines remove the sources of the malady, and with them some of the germs of the smallpox, leaving those that remain the power of developing more freely, thus preventing the disease from becoming confluent; at this stage lemonade and other refreshing drinks purify and cool the blood, flow with it through the sebaceous glands of the skin, prevent the corrosion of those glands and, thus, the disease from pitting the face.

There is, however, one condition in which cordials, and very powerful ones, are absolutely necessary—that is, when the blood is very sluggish and, rendered more so by the germs of the disease, has not the strength to throw out the poisons with which it is charged. Then the Countess of Kent's powders, Vauseger's balsam, and M. Aignan's remedy, breaking up the congealed blood, make it flow more rapidly, by dispersing the foreign bodies and opening the pores of the skin so that the poison may escape through perspiration.

But in my condition such cordials would have been fatal to me, which proves beyond a doubt

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that all those quacks who overrun Paris and who prescribe the same remedy (I do not say for all diseases, but always for the same disease) are poisoners who ought to be imprisoned.

I constantly hear used a most false and fatal argument. "Such and such a man," it is said, "has been cured by such and such a means: I have his complaint, so I must try his remedy." How many people have died for having reasoned thus! People do not choose to see that the complaints which afflict us are as different as the features of our faces: and as the great Corneille said, if you will permit me to quote the poets:

> "Quelquefois l'un se brise ou l'autre s'est sauvé,
> Et par où l'un périt un autre est conservé."

But I am becoming very technical! just as people who have won a lawsuit by the help of counsel air a knowledge of legal terms.

Nothing comforted me so much in my illness as the interest you took in it, the kindness of my friends, and the inexpressible goodness of Mme. and M. de Maisons. I was also fortunate to have with me a friend, one of those rare friends who really know what friendship is (the world knows but its name), I mean M. Thieriot, who posted forty miles to look after me and has never since

left me for a moment. By the 15th I was absolutely out of danger; by the 16th I was writing verses, despite extreme weakness, from which I still suffer as an after effect of the complaint and the remedies.

I was impatiently awaiting the moment when I could escape the Maisons' kindness and cease to be a burden to them. The greater their goodness, the greater my anxiety not to impose on it. At last, on December 1st, I was fit to travel to Paris. A fatal day! I was scarcely two hundred yards from the château, when a part of the flooring of the room I had occupied burst into flames. The rooms adjoining and above, and their valuable furniture, were all totally destroyed, the loss being estimated at a hundred thousand livres, and without the help of the fire engines which were sent for from Paris, one of the most beautiful buildings in the kingdom would have been totally destroyed.

This extraordinary news was hidden from me: I was only told of it on my recovery: you can imagine my state of mind: you know the generous kindness I had received from M. de Maisons: I had been treated in his house like his brother, and the reward of his goodness was the burning down of his house! I could not conceive how the conflagration had developed so rapidly in my bed-

room, as I had left there only a small fire on the hearth, nearly out. I found out that the cause was a beam which was just under the fireplace. This defect in construction has been corrected in modern buildings: the frequent fires which it occasioned made it necessary to pass laws forbidding so dangerous an arrangement. The beam I speak of was gradually set on fire by the heat of the hearth, immediately above it: and by a strange chance, on which I can hardly congratulate myself, the fire, which had been smouldering for two days, only burst out after I had left.

I was not the cause of this accident; but I was its unhappy occasion: it grieved me as much as if I had been actually responsible for it: the fever came back, and I assure you that, at that moment, I did not thank M. de Gervasi for having saved my life.

M. and Mme. de Maisons took the news more calmly than I did: their generosity was as great as their loss and as my regret. M. de Maisons crowned his goodness to me by telling me the news himself in letters which proved his heart to be as noble as his mind: his only anxiety was to reassure me: but his generosity made me feel the more keenly the loss I had brought upon him, and I shall regret it, as I shall admire him, to the end of my days. I am, etc., etc.

VI

THE PRISONER DICTATES

To the Minister for the Department of Paris

[Voltaire, having engaged in a quarrel with the "*Chevalier de Rohan*," the representative of the haughtiest family in France, challenged him to a duel. The Chevalier replied by a warrant to imprison his enemy, who thus found himself for a second time in the Bastille. The contempt and satire the writer permits himself in this petition to be sent to England prove that he knew well the power of "l'audace, l'audace, et toujours de l'audace"—provided always the audacity has brains and character to back it. The result of his demand was his exile in England for nearly three years, and his famous work, the *English Letters*, which bear such striking witness to his keen observation and admiration of the British character and constitution.]

THE BASTILLE, April, 1726.

M. de Voltaire ventures humbly to point out that an attempt has been made to assassinate him by the brave Chevalier de Rohan (assisted by six cut-throats, behind whom the Chevalier courageously placed himself); and that ever since, M.

de Voltaire has tried to repair, not his own honour, but that of the Chevalier—which has proved too difficult. . . . M. de Voltaire demands permission to dine at the table of the Governor of the Bastille and to see his friends. He demands, still more urgently, permission to set out for England. If any doubt is felt as to the reality of his departure for that country, an escort can be sent with him to Calais.

VII

ON THE ADVANTAGES OF LIVING IN ENGLAND

To M. Thériot.

[This letter was written after a brief stolen visit to Paris, during the English exile. The contrast between the stolid and silent gloom of the ordinary Briton in misfortune and the lively and active despair—ay, with a certain enjoyment in that despair—of an essentially Gallic temperament is noticeable.

"*The hero of my poem*"—Henri IV in the *Henriade*.

"*I was seeking one man*"—the Chevalier de Rohan.

"*My pensions from the King and Queen*"—the King and Queen of France, for whom Voltaire had written plays and *divertissements*.]

August 12, 1726.

My dear Thieriot, I received your letter of May 11th very late. You know how unlucky I was in Paris. The same evil fate pursues me everywhere. If the character of the hero of my poem is as well sustained as my own ill luck, that poem will certainly succeed better than I do. You give me such touching assurances of your friendship that it is only fair I should give you my confidence. So I will confide in you, my dear Thieriot, that, a little while ago, I paid a brief visit to Paris. As I did not see you, you will know I saw nobody. I was seeking one man, who hid, like the coward he is, as if he guessed I was on his track. My fear of being discovered made me leave more hurriedly than I came. The fact is my dear Thieriot, there is every likelihood that I shall never see you again. I am still uncertain if I shall retire to London. I know that England is a land where the arts are honoured and re-

warded, where there is a difference of conditions, but no other difference between men, save merit. In this country it is possible to use one's mind freely and nobly, without fear or cringing. If I followed my own inclination, I should stay here; if only to learn how to think. But I am not sure if my small fortune—eaten into by so much travelling—my health, more precarious than ever, and my love of solitude, will make it possible for me to fling myself into the hurly-burly of Whitehall and of London.

I have many introductions in England, and much kindness awaits me there: but I cannot say positively that I shall take the plunge. There are two things I must do: first, risk my life for honour's sake as soon as I can; then, end it in the obscurity of some retreat suited to my turn of mind, my misfortunes, and my low opinion of mankind.

I can cheerfully renounce my pensions from the King and Queen: my only regret being that I have not been able to arrange that you should take advantage of them. It would be a consolation to me in my solitude if I could feel I had been useful to you for once in my life: but I am fated to be wretched in every way. . . . Farewell, my dear Thieriot: love me, despite absence and misfortune.

VIII

MAKING A BARGAIN

To Dean Swift

[While in England Voltaire met, among many other celebrities of these islands, Jonathan Swift: and the following letter asks the Dean of St. Patrick's to permit a dedication to him of that *Essay on the Civil Wars of France*, a presentation copy of which is now in the British Museum, inscribed on the fly-leaf in Voltaire's neat little handwriting, "to Sr han Slone from his most humble servant voltaire." Sir Hans Sloane was the President of the Royal Society. Voltaire's definition of Swift as "Rabelais in his senses" is well known.]

At the Sign of the White Peruke,
Covent Garden, London,
December 14, 1727.

You will be surprised, sir, to receive from a French traveller an Essay, in English, on the Civil Wars of France—which form the subject of the *Henriade*. I beg your indulgence for one of your admirers, who, through your writings, has become so fond of the English language that he has the temerity to write in it himself.

You will see, by the Preface, that I have had certain designs on you, and have ventured there to speak of you, for the honour of your country and the good of mine: do not forbid me to adorn my work with your name.

Let me have the satisfaction of speaking of you now, as posterity most certainly will.

Might I ask you, at the same time, to use your influence in Ireland to procure me a few subscribers to the *Henriade*, which, for want of such assistance, has not yet appeared?

The subscription is only a guinea, payable in advance.

I am, sir, with the profoundest esteem, your very humble and obedient servant,

VOLTAIRE.

IX

ON THE TREATMENT OF SORROW

To . . . .

[Written from England to an anonymous friend in bereavement. Voltaire had lately lost his elder sister, Catherine, Mme. Mignot, who had mothered him in his childhood, and to whom he was deeply attached. This letter—commonly

called The Letter of Consolation—gives evidence of a deeper feeling than Voltaire is usually credited with, and of the healing wisdom that comes from the heart. His life gave proof of his fidelity to a memory, in his unvarying kindness to Mme. Mignot's three children—Mme. Denis, Mme. de Fontaine, and the Abbé Mignot.]

ENGLAND, 1728.

The squaring of the circle and perpetual motion are simple discoveries in comparison to the secret of bringing peace to a soul distraught by passionate grief. It is only magicians who pretend to calm storms with words. If an injured man, with a deep, gaping wound, begs his surgeon to close that wound so that only a slight scar shall remain, the surgeon replies: "That must be done by a greater physician than I am: only Time can mend what has been torn in a moment. I can amputate, cut out, destroy; Time alone can repair."

So is it with the wounds of the soul: the would-be comforter inflames and excites them: or, attempting to comfort, moves to fresh tears: but Time cures at last.

If one gets well into one's head that finally nature obliterates our deepest impressions: that after a certain time we have neither the same

blood in our veins nor the same fibres in the brain, and, consequently, not the same ideas—that, in a word, we are really and physically no longer the same person; if, I say, we thus reflect, we shall find great help in the thought and shall hasten our recovery.

We must say to ourselves, "I have proved that the death of my relatives and my friends, after having half broken my heart for a while, has eventually left me perfectly calm: I have felt that, after a few years, a new soul was born in me: that the heart of twenty-five does not feel as the heart of twenty did, nor that of twenty as that of fifteen." Let us try, then, to put ourselves now as much as possible in the situation in which we shall certainly be one day: let us get the start of time in thought.

This, of course, supposes freedom of action on our part. He who asks advice must consider himself free, for it would be absurd to ask advice if it were impossible to take it. In business we always act on the assumption that we are free: let us so act in our passions, which are our most important business. Nature never intended that our wounds should be closed in a moment—that we should pass in a second from sickness to health: but wise remedies will certainly accelerate our cure.

I know no more powerful remedy for the sorrows of the heart than deep and serious application of the mind to other objects.

This application changes the gloomy tenor of the spirits—sometimes even makes us insensible to bodily ills. Any one who devotes himself to music or to reading a good book, which appeals at once to the mind and to the imagination, finds speedy relief from the sufferings of an illness: he also finds that, little by little, the pangs of the heart lose their sharpness.

He is obliged to think of something quite other than that which he is trying to forget: and one has to think often—nay, constantly—of what one wishes to retain. The strongest chains are, in the long run, those of custom. It depends, I believe, on ourselves to break the links which bind us to our sorrows and to strengthen those which attach us to happier things.

Not, indeed, that we are absolute masters of our thoughts: that implies much: but neither are we absolute slaves: and, once again, I believe that the Supreme Being has given us a little of His *liberty*, as He has given us a little of His *power of thought.*

Let us make use, then, of such weapons as we have. We undoubtedly add, by reading and thinking, to our *power of thought:* why should we,

then, not also add to what is called our *liberty?* There is no one of our senses or our powers which has not been helped by effort. Why should liberty be the only one of man's attributes which he cannot increase?

Suppose, for instance, we see round us trees hung with a delicious but poisoned fruit, which a raging hunger incites us to pick: if we feel ourselves too weak to abstain, let us go (and going depends on ourselves) to places where there are no such fruits.

These are counsels which, like so many others, are no doubt easier to give than to follow: but we are in the presence of a disease wherein the patient must minister to himself.

X

CONSOLING A FAILURE

To Mdlle. Dangeville

[Written after the production of Voltaire's Roman tragedy *Brutus*, in which the youthful Mdlle. Dangeville played, very badly, the important part of Tullie. No other playwright, surely, —not even another Frenchman,—ever reassured

a timid *ingénue* who had spoilt his piece with more delicacy and consideration.]

December, 1731.

Prodigy, allow me to present you with a copy of the *Henriade*—a very serious work for your age—but she who can play Tullie cannot be incapable of serious reading, and it is only right that I should lay my works at the feet of her who bestows her beauty on them. I thought I was going to die this evening, and am, truly, very ill: otherwise I should have offered you thanks and homage for the honour you did me to-day. The piece is unworthy of you: but you must remember what laurels you will win in endowing my Tullie with your graces. It will owe its success to you. But to achieve that success you must not hurry any of your lines; you must lighten them, add pathos to declamation, and be sure to take plenty of time. Above all, put all your soul and strength into the final couplet of the first act. Put terror and grief into that last little bit—speak slowly. Appear to be in utter despair—and so will your rivals be. Farewell, prodigy!

Don't be discouraged! Remember you played to perfection at rehearsals: and yesterday you needed nothing but confidence. Yet your very diffidence does you honour. You must take

your revenge to-morrow. I saw *Mariamne* a failure: and I have seen it a success.

Anyhow, for Heavens' sake, don't worry yourself! Even if it does not go well, what matter? You are only fifteen: and the worst any one could say of you would be that you are not yet what you undoubtedly will be. For my part, I offer you very grateful thanks: if you do not realise how tenderly and respectfully I regard you, you will never act tragedy. Begin by being the friend of one who loves you as a father, and you will play your rôle charmingly.

Farewell: it depends on yourself to be divine to-morrow.

XI

ON WRITING CONTEMPORARY HISTORY

To M. Bertin de Rocheret

[In the autumn of 1730, Voltaire had had ready for publication his bold and vigorous "*History of Charles XII*" of Sweden, which, written in England, contained so much of the "noble liberty of thinking" he had admired in our country, that the French authorities seized and prohibited it. By October, 1731, he had had it secretly reprinted

and introduced into Paris, where it was widely read.]

PARIS, April 14, 1732.

I received very late, my dear sir, the letter with which you have honoured me. I am fully sensible of your goodness in throwing so much light on the *History of Charles XII.* I shall not fail, in future editions, to profit by your observations.

Meanwhile, I have the honour to send you by the coach a copy of the new edition, in which you will find some previous mistakes corrected.

You will still see many printer's errors, but I cannot be responsible for those, and only think of my own. The book has been produced in France with so much haste and secrecy that the proof-reader could not go through it. As you yourself, sir, are a writer of history, you will know the difficulty of choosing between absolutely opposite stories. Three officers who were at Pultawa have given me three entirely different accounts of that battle. M. de Fierville and M. de Villelongue contradict each other flatly on the subject of the intrigues at the Porte. My greatest difficulty has not been to find Memoirs but to find good ones. There is another drawback inseparable from writing contemporary history: every infantry captain, who has seen ever so little

service with the armies of Charles XII, if he happens to have lost his kit on a march, thinks I ought to have mentioned him. If the subalterns grumble at my silence, the generals and ministers complain of my outspokenness. Whoso writes the history of his own time must expect to be attacked for everything he has said, and for everything he has not said: but those little drawbacks should not discourage a man who loves truth and liberty, expects nothing, fears nothing, asks nothing, and limits his ambition to the cultivation of letters.

I am highly flattered, sir, that this *métier* of mine has given me the pleasure of your delightful and instructive letter. I sincerely thank you for it, and beg the continuance of your kind interest.

I am, etc.

VOLTAIRE.

XII

ON THE LIBERTY OF THE PRESS: AND ON THEATRES

To a First Commissioner

[The extreme severity of the French censorship of the press in the eighteenth century must be borne in mind in reading this letter. Almost

every French author whose works expressed speculative opinions expiated them in the Bastille, and his printer and publisher at the galleys.

Bayle, one of the most daring thinkers of the seventeenth century, was the author of the famous *Dictionnaire Historique et Critique*, which, proscribed both in France and Holland, had immense influence on the thought of the age, and may be said to have been rationalism's first protest against the dogmatism of the churches. Those "*infamous calottes*," against which Voltaire had already written a brief, condemnatory article, now in his *Mélanges*, were a collection of epigrams, as stupid as they were scandalous, which had been collected and published in 1732.

A year after this letter was written, Voltaire's own *English Letters* were publicly burnt by the hangman: and he was compelled to flee the capital.

The system, of course, entirely defeated its own ends. The hangman's fire blazed into notoriety the very works it sought to destroy: while the secret printing of the scurrilous and the indecent was ubiquitous.]

June 20, 1733.

As you have it in your power, sir, to do some service to letters, I implore you not to clip the

wings of our writers so closely, nor to turn into barn-door fowls those who, allowed a start, might become eagles; reasonable liberty permits the mind to soar—slavery makes it creep.

Had there been a literary censorship in Rome, we should have had to-day neither Horace, Juvenal, nor the philosophical works of Cicero. If Milton, Dryden, Pope, and Locke had not been free, England would have had neither poets nor philosophers; there is something positively Turkish in proscribing printing; and hampering it *is* proscription. Be content with severely repressing defamatory libels, for they are crimes: but so long as those infamous *calottes* are boldly published, and so many other unworthy and despicable productions, at least allow Bayle to circulate in France, and do not put him, who has been so great an honour to his country, among its contraband.

You say that the magistrates who regulate the literary custom-house complain that there are too many books. That is just the same thing as if the provost of merchants complained there were too many provisions in Paris. People buy what they choose. A great library is like the City of Paris, in which there are about eight hundred thousand persons: you do not live with the whole crowd: you choose a certain society, and change it. So with books: you choose a few friends out

of the many. There will be seven or eight thousand controversial books, and fifteen or sixteen thousand novels, which you will not read: a heap of pamphlets, which you will throw into the fire after you have read them. The man of taste will only read what is good; but the statesman will permit both bad and good.

Men's thoughts have become an important article of commerce. The Dutch publishers make a million [francs] a year, because Frenchmen have brains. A feeble novel is, I know, among books what a fool, always striving after wit, is in the world. We laugh at him and tolerate him. Such a novel brings the means of life to the author who wrote it, the publisher who sells it, to the moulder, the printer, the paper-maker, the binder, the carrier—and finally to the bad wine-shop where they all take their money. Further, the book amuses for an hour or two a few women who like novelty in literature as in everything. Thus, despicable though it may be, it will have produced two important things—profit and pleasure.

The theatre also deserves attention. I do not consider it a counter attraction to dissipation: that is a notion only worthy of an ignorant curé. There is quite time enough, before and after the performance, for the few minutes given to those passing pleasures which are so soon followed by

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satiety. Besides, people do not go to the theatre every day, and among our vast population there are not more than four thousand who are in the habit of going constantly.

I look on tragedy and comedy as lessons in virtue, good sense, and good behaviour. Corneille—the old Roman of the French—has founded a school of Spartan virtue: Molière, a school of ordinary everyday life. These great national geniuses attract foreigners from all parts of Europe, who come to study among us, and thus contribute to the wealth of Paris. Our poor are fed by the production of such works, which bring under our rule the very nations who hate us. In fact, he who condemns the theatre is an enemy to his country. A magistrate who, because he has succeeded in buying some judicial post, thinks that it is beneath his dignity to see *Cinna*, shows much pomposity and very little taste.

There are still Goths and Vandals even among our cultivated people: the only Frenchmen I consider worthy of the name are those who love and encourage the arts. It is true that the taste for them is languishing: we are sybarites, weary of our mistresses' favours. We enjoy the fruits of the labours of the great men who have worked for our pleasure and that of the ages to come, just as we receive the fruits of nature as if they were

our due. . . nothing will rouse us from this indifference to great things which always goes side by side with our vivid interest in small.

Every year we take more pains over snuff-boxes and nicknacks than the English took to make themselves masters of the seas. . . . The old Romans raised those marvels of architecture —their amphitheatres—for beasts to fight in: and for a whole century we have not built a single passable place for the representation of the masterpieces of the human mind. A hundredth part of the money spent on cards would be enough to build theatres finer than Pompey's: but what man in Paris has the public welfare at heart? We play, sup, talk scandal, write bad verses, and sleep, like fools, to recommence on the morrow the same round of careless frivolity.

You, sir, who have at least some small opportunity of giving good advice, try and rouse us from this stupid lethargy, and, if you can, do something for literature, which has done so much for France.

XIII

ON GETTING INTO A HOUSE

To Mme. de Champbonin

[In 1734 Voltaire, in order to avoid arrest consequent on the appearance of his *English Let-*

ters, went to the Château of Cirey-sur-Blaise in Champagne, a country house of the Marquis and Marquise du Châtelet. The Marquise, one of the most brilliantly accomplished women of her generation—perhaps of any generation—was for fifteen years Voltaire's mistress, and for that fifteen years Cirey was his home.

Mme. de Champbonin was a stout, good-natured country neighbour and a distant relative of Voltaire.

The Comtesse de la Neuville, to whom the next letter is addressed, was also a country neighbour.]

1734.

Mme. du Châtelet is here, having arrived from Paris only yesterday evening, at the precise moment when I was handed a letter from her telling me she could not possibly come so soon. She is surrounded by two hundred large packages, which arrived here the same day as she did. We have beds with no curtains, rooms with no windows, cabinets of china and no chairs, inviting carriages and no horses to put into them.

Mme. du Châtelet, in the midst of this confusion, is quite lively and charming. She arrived in a sort of farm cart, shaken and bruised, and having had no sleep, but extremely well. She

bids me give you her kindest regards. We are piecing together old tapestries, and hunting for curtains to take the place of doors—all in anticipation of your visit. I swear to you, joking apart, you will be exceedingly comfortable. Goodbye. Yours always affectionately and respectfully.

XIV

ON THE SAME SUBJECT

To Mme. la Comtesse de la Neuville

CIREY, 1734.

It seems an age since I have seen you. Mme. du Châtelet fully intended coming to call on you directly after she arrived at Cirey: but she has turned gardener and architect. She puts windows where I have put doors: she alters staircases into fireplaces, and fireplaces into staircases: she has limes planted where I had settled on elms: she has changed what I had made a vegetable plot into a flower garden. Indoors, she has done the work of a good fairy. Rags are bewitched into tapestry: she has found out the secret of furnishing Cirey out of nothing. She will be engrossed in these occupations for several

days longer. I hope to have the honour of acting as her post-boy to Neuville, having been her garden-boy here. She bids me assure you and Mme. de Champbonin how anxious she is to see you. You may be sure I am not less impatient.

XV

ON THE "PUCELLE" AND THE "CENTURY OF LOUIS XIV"

To the Abbé d'Olivet

[*The Abbé d'Olivet*, to whom this letter is addressed, had been Voltaire's tutor at the School of Louis-le-Grand and remained his friend for more than fifty years.

"*The Pucelle*" was Voltaire's ribald, versified history of Joan of Arc: "my Jeanne" as he often called it, and at once the plague and pleasure of his life: "the epic he was fitted for," said Edward Fitzgerald, "poor in invention, I think, but wonderful for easy wit." Begun in 1730, it soon became a source of danger: cantos, read aloud to a few delighted friends in the Cirey bathroom, mysteriously found their way into print. In 1755 an incorrect edition was published in Paris,

and was publicly burnt there and at Geneva, its printer being rewarded with nine years at the galleys. The author himself—though he often had occasion to allude to it as "that cursed 'Pucelle'"—never suffered anything worse than frights from it. The year 1762 saw its first authorized publication.

"*The Century of Louis XIV*" was chiefly written at Cirey, the amassing of material taking its author years of joyful labour, but it did not appear till 1751. It was immediately prohibited, "because I have spoken the truth," wrote Voltaire to his English friend Falkener. Its incomparable *verve* and spirit further offended a government which had not only made up its mind that governments ought never to be criticised, but that histories ought always to be dull. It remains now, as Condorcet declared it to be, the only readable history of the age of the Roi Soleil.

The tragedy "*The Death of Cæsar*" was founded on Shakespeare's *Julius Cæsar*. Voltaire himself, if no one else, considered it to be an improvement on its model. Its absence of love-interest told against it with the male as well as the female part of the audience, and it was unsuccessful.

"*The tender 'Zaïre'*" was one of the earliest as well as the most moving of Voltaire's tragedies, and still in some measure keeps its popularity.]

CIREY, August 24, 1735.

You do not know, my dear Abbé, how sorry I am that I have spent so much of my life without the benefit of your conversation. You are the man of whom I would like to have seen most, and of whom I have seen least. Should I ever emerge from my present happy retirement, I can answer for it I shall make better use of my time. I love the classics, and everything that is good in the moderns, above anything society can offer. Give me the pleasure of a little of your cultivation in your letters until we meet again. What you call *my* Ariosto is a trifle, not nearly so long as his. I should have been ashamed to have devoted thirty cantos to such rubbish. There are only ten cantos in my *Pucelle*. So, you see, I am two-thirds wiser than Ariosto. I regard these trifles as interludes to my work. There is time for everything if one likes to use it.

My chief occupation at present is that grand *Century of Louis XIV*. Battles and revolutions are the smallest part of the plan: squadrons and battalions conquering or being conquered, towns taken and retaken, are common to all history: the age of Louis XIV, so far as war and politics go, has no advantage over any other. They are, as a matter of fact, less interesting than during the time of the League and Charles V.

Take away the arts and the progress of the mind from this age, and you will find nothing remarkable left to attract the attention of posterity. So, my dear Abbé, if you know of any source from which I can get anecdotes of our arts and artists, of any sort or kind, let me know. There will be a place for everything.

I have already accumulated the building materials for this great structure. The *Memoirs* of Fathers Nicéron and Desmolets are among the briefest of my authorities. I enjoy even sharpening my tools. It is an amusement to collect the materials: I find something useful in every book. You know that a painter sees things differently from other people: he notes effects of light and shade which escape ordinary eyes. That is my case: I have appointed myself painter of the century of Louis XIV, and look at everything from that point of view—like La Flèche, who turned everything to his own advantage.

Did you know that I staged, a little while ago, at the Collège d'Harcourt, a certain *Death of Cæsar*, a tragedy quite after my heart, without a woman in it? It contains some verses such as people wrote sixty years ago. I should much like you to see it. It is of a Roman severity. All the young women think it

horrible: and cannot recognise in it the author of the tender *Zaïre*.

XVI

ON FREE-THINKING IN PRINCES

To Frederick, Prince Royal of Prussia

[In August, 1736, Voltaire had begun a correspondence, and one of the most famous and chequered friendships in history, with the young prince who became Frederick the Great of Prussia.

All Voltaire's early letters to his royal protégé evince the glamour and fascination which, despite his astute, cool, and cynical mind, not seldom possessed his heart: and he honestly overrated the talents of this brilliant young heir-apparent, as he constantly overrated (it is one of the generous weaknesses of genius) the acquirements of more ordinary people. As for the flattery, the *convenances* of the time demanded plenty of it: Voltaire's was at least very skilfully administered: and, in this letter as in all he wrote, if back and knee are supple, there is no cringing of the heart of the man who was so little of a flatterer that he spent three parts of his life in exile for telling his countrymen unpalatable truths.

"*Keyserlingk*" or *Kaiserling* was Prince Frederick's social ambassador, a lively young Prussian with a pretty talent for writing French verse.

"*Newton's Philosophy*" was the book which later appeared under the title of *Elements of Newton's Philosophy* and in which Voltaire and Mme. du Châtelet translated and simplified the Newtonian system for the benefit of the French people.]

CIREY, July, 1737.

I am quite overwhelmed, sir, with so many favours—M. de Keyserlingk's visit, the portrait of your Royal Highness, the second part of Wolff's *Metaphysics*, de Beausobre's *Dissertation*, and, above all, the charming letter you so graciously wrote me from Ruppin on July 6th. With such advantages, I can cheerfully support the fever and languor which are sapping my strength: and I find it possible to suffer and be happy.

Your ambassador has recovered from his gout: we are about to lose him, and shall greatly miss, as we shall always remember, him when he returns to his beloved prince, whose supremacy he has thoroughly established in all hearts here. He takes with him my little tribute—all I have. It is said there are tyrants who rob their subjects.

but good subjects freely give their all to good sovereigns.

I therefore send in a small parcel as much as I have as yet done of the *Century of Louis XIV*, a few verses which were printed at the end of the *Henriade* and which are full of faults, and some trifles in philosophy. . . . I should willingly have added the *Pucelle*, but, as your ambassador will tell you, that is impossible. For a year Mme. du Châtelet has never let it out of her sight. The friendship with which she honours me will not permit me to risk what might separate me from her for ever: she has given up everything to live with me in the bosom of solitude and study: she knows that the smallest proof of the existence of such a work would certainly raise a storm. She dreads any such accident. She knows that M. de Keyserlingk was under observation at Strasbourg when he came, and will be when he returns; that he is a marked man and may be searched; above all, she is quite sure you would not wish your two subjects of Cirey to risk ruin for a joke in verse. Your Royal Highness would find that little poem of rather a different kind from the "History of Louis XIV" and "Newton's Philosophy"! *Sed dulce est desipere in loco.*

Woe to philosophers who cannot laugh away their learned wrinkles! I look on solemnity as a

disease: I had rather a thousand times be as feeble and feverish as I am now than think lugubriously. It seems to me that morality, study, and gaiety are three sisters who should never be separated: they are your servants; I take them as my mistresses.

Your great mind estimates metaphysics very highly, and I do not hesitate to put before you my doubts on the matter, and to beg from your royal hands a thread to guide me through the labyrinth. You can hardly understand, sir, what a consolation it is for Mme. du Châtelet and myself to find you so true a philosopher, and so good a hater of superstition. If most kings have encouraged it in their dominions it was from ignorance and because they did not know that priests are their greatest enemies.

Is there indeed a single example in the history of the world of priests having promoted a good understanding between kings and their subjects? Do we not see, on the contrary, that it is always the priests who raise the standard of discord and rebellion? Was it not the Scotch Presbyters who began that unhappy civil war which cost Charles I—who was a good man—his life? Was it not a monk who assassinated Henri IV, King of France? Is not Europe still full of the results of ecclesiastical ambition: of bishops who become

first princes and then your equals in the electorate: of a bishop of Rome forcing the hand of emperors: are these not proofs strong enough?

As for me, when I think how weak and foolish mankind is, I am only surprised that, in the dark ages, the Popes did not set up an universal monarchy.

I am persuaded that now only a monarch can crush the seeds of religious hatred and ecclesiastical discord in his kingdom. But he must be an honest man, not priest-ridden; for, fools though they are, men know very well in their hearts that goodness is better than religious observance. Under a sanctimonious king his subjects are hypocrites: a king who is an honest man makes his people as himself.

Your noble character encourages me thus to think aloud to your Royal Highness. I have just had a conversation with M. Keyserlingk which has further quickened my ardour and my admiration for you. My only misfortune is that my health is so feeble that I shall most likely never be a personal witness of the good you do and the great example you set. Happy they who will see those great days, who with their own eyes will witness the reign of glory and prosperity! But I shall at least have enjoyed the favours of the philosopher-prince, and the first-fruits of his soul.

XVII

ON GOD, THE SOUL, AND INNATE MORALITY

To Frederick, Prince Royal of Prussia

[Three things are always conspicuous in Voltaire when he treats of grave subjects—the extreme neatness and clearness of his ideas, their rapid sequence, and the tincture of levity that inevitably creeps in somewhere. Joubert said that Voltaire was never serious. It would be truer to say he was never reverent.

The paper "*On Liberty*" was enclosed.]

CIREY, October, 1737.

. . . You bid me, sir, give you an account of my metaphysical doubts. I therefore take the liberty of sending you an extract from a paper *On Liberty*. Your Royal Highness will find it honest, even if ignorant: would to God all the ignorant were as truthful!

Perhaps the idea I am always pursuing, that there is neither vice nor virtue: that neither punishment nor reward is necessary: that society would be (especially among philosophers) an interchange of wickedness and hypocrisy if man had not full and absolute liberty—perhaps, I say, this

opinion has led me too far in this work. But if you find errors in my judgment, forgive them for the sake of the principle which gave them birth.

I always reduce, so far as I can, my metaphysics to morality. I have honestly sought, with all the attention of which I am capable, to gain some definite idea of the human soul, and I own that the result of all my researches is ignorance. I find a principle—thinking, free, active—almost like God Himself: my reason tells me that God exists: but it also tells me that I cannot know what He is.

Is it indeed likely that we should know what our soul is, when we can form no idea of light if we have had the misfortune to be born blind? I see then, with regret, that all that has been written about the soul teaches us nothing at all.

After my vain groping to discover its nature, my chief aim has been to try at least to regulate it: it is the mainspring of our clock. All Descartes' fine ideas on its elasticity tell me nothing of the nature of the spring: I am ignorant even of the cause of that flexibility: however, I wind up my timepiece, and it goes passably well.

I examine man. We must see if, of whatsoever materials he is composed, there is vice and virtue in them. That is the important point with regard to him—I do not say merely with regard to a certain society living under certain laws: but for

the whole human race; for you, sir, who will one day sit on a throne, for the wood-cutter in your forest, for the Chinese doctor, and for the savage of America. Locke, the wisest metaphysician I know, while he very rightly attacks the theory of innate ideas, seems to think that there is no universal moral principle. I venture to doubt, or rather, to elucidate the great man's theory on this point. I agree with him that there is really no such thing as innate thought: whence it obviously follows that there is no principle of morality innate in our souls: but because we are not born with beards, is it just to say that we are not born (we, the inhabitants of this continent) to have beards at a certain age?

We are not born able to walk: but everyone, born with two feet, will walk one day. Thus, no one is born with the idea he must be just: but God has so made us that, at a certain age, we all agree to this truth.

It seems clear to me that God designed us to live in society—just as He has given the bees the instincts and the powers to make honey: and as our social system could not subsist without the sense of justice and injustice, He has given us the power to acquire that sense. It is true that varying customs make us attach the idea of justice to different things. What is a crime in Europe

will be a virtue in Asia, just as German dishes do not please French palates: but God has so made Germans and French that they both like good living. All societies, then, will not have the same laws, but no society will be without laws. Therefore, the good of the greatest number is the immutable law of virtue, as established by all men from Pekin to Ireland: what is useful to society will be good for every country. This idea reconciles the contradictions which appear in morality. Robbery was permitted in Lacedæmonia: why? because all goods were held in common, and the man who stole from the greedy who kept for himself what the law gave to the public, was a social benefactor.

There are savages who eat men, and believe they do well. I say those savages have the same idea of right and wrong as ourselves. As we do, they make war from anger and passion: the same crimes are committed everywhere: to eat your enemies is but an extra ceremonial. The wrong does not consist in roasting, but in killing them: and I dare swear there is no cannibal who believes that he is doing right when he cuts his enemy's throat. I saw four savages from Louisiana who were brought to France in 1723. There was a woman among them of a very gentle disposition. I asked her, through an interpreter, if she had ever eaten the flesh of her enemies and if she liked

it; she answered, Yes. I asked her if she would be willing to kill, or to have killed, any one of her fellow-countrymen in order to eat him: she answered, shuddering, visibly horrified by such a crime. I defy the most determined liar among travellers to dare to tell me that there is a community or a family where to break one's word is laudable. I am deeply rooted in the belief that, God having made certain animals to graze in common, others to meet occasionally two and two, rarely, and spiders to spin webs, each species has the tools necessary for the work it has to do.

Put two men on the globe, and they will only call good, right, just, what will be good for them both. Put four, and they will only consider virtuous what suits them all: and if one of the four eats his neighbour's supper, or fights or kills him, he will certainly raise the others against him. And what is true of these four men is true of the universe. . . .

XVIII

ON THE MARRIAGE OF VOLTAIRE'S NIECES

To M. Thériot

[These nieces were the daughters of Voltaire's sister Catherine, Mme. Mignot, to whom he had

been so deeply attached. The elder, Louise, who eventually became Mme. Denis and no small factor in her uncle's life, he is proposing in this letter to marry to a relative of his Cirey neighbour, Mme. de Champbonin. This *parti*—and the prospect of living in "our little earthly Paradise" near Cirey—Louise declined, preferring M. Denis and Paris. The younger sister also preferred to choose her husbands herself, and became successively Mme. de Fontaine and the Marquise de Florian.]

December 21, 1737.

I hasten, my dear friend, to reply to your letter of the 18th, regarding my niece. You tell Mme. du Châtelet that you think I am considering the interests of the gentleman for whom I design her rather than those of my niece herself.

I think I am considering the interests of them both, just as I am considering my own, in trying to have near me a person to whom I am attached by the ties of blood and friendship, and whom I find both intelligent and accomplished. I have discovered also a modest little property, suitable to a gentleman and lucrative, which my niece would be able to buy, and which would belong to her personally.

I do not know the younger sister so well, but when it comes to settling her in her turn, I shall do all that is in my power for her. If my elder niece were content with the country and would like some day to have her sister near her: if this sister would prefer being mistress of a château to a poor townswoman in Paris, I should like nothing better than to see her also married in our little earthly Paradise. When all is said and done, they are the only family I have: I shall be only too happy to become fond of them. I have to remember that I shall grow old and infirm, and that then it will be very comforting to have relatives attached to me by gratitude.

If they marry *bourgeois* of Paris, I am their very humble servant, but they are lost to me. An old maid's is a wretched state. Princesses of the blood can hardly endure a condition so unnatural. We are born to have children. There are only a few fools of philosophers—we being of their number—who can decently make themselves exceptions to the rule.

I can assure you, I purpose nothing but Mdlle. Mignot's happiness, but she must take the same view of it as I do: as for you, who are forced to make other people's happiness—it is part of your rôle to add to hers. . . . My warmest regards.

XIX

ON A QUIET LIFE AND A FIT OF DISCOURAGEMENT

To Mdlle. Quinault

[Mdlle. Quinault, a charming actress, chiefly of light comedy, was also a witty and cultivated woman of the world. She had suggested to Voltaire the subject of his play the *Prodigal Son* and herself played a part in it. She retired from the boards when she was forty, in 1741, but lived until 1783—gay, sociable, delightful, to the end.

"*Those Italian mountebanks.*" Voltaire's plays were parodied by an Italian company at the Foire theatre.

"*Decried by bigots and looked down upon at Court.*" Voltaire himself well described the status of the actor in France in the eighteenth century as "paid by the King and excommunicated by the Church . . . commanded by the King to play every evening, and by the Church forbidden to do so at all. If they do not play, they are put into prison: if they do, they are spurned into the gutter. . . . It must be allowed we are a most reasonable and consistent nation." In 1730, the fate of Adrienne Le Couvreur, the great tragic

actress, who was refused Christian burial and taken without the city at night, to be "thrown into the kennel like a dead dog," had stirred him to passionate rage and pity and to his touching Poem on her Death, and rankled in his soul for ever.

"*The Abbé Desfontaines*," with whom Voltaire was engaged in a bitter and famous quarrel (see Letter XXI, "On Treachery").

"*Zamore*" and "*Alzire*," characters in Voltaire's tragedies.

CIREY, August 16, 1738.

I am far from sure that I have not finally abandoned the dangerous longing to be judged by the public. There comes a time, my dear Thalia, when the love of repose and the charms of a quiet life carry all before them. Happy he who knows how to escape early the seductions of fame, the storms of envy, the thoughtless judgments of men!

I have only too much reason to repent of having laboured for anything except peace. What have I gained by twenty years' work? Nothing but enemies. That is almost the only reward to be expected from the cultivation of letters—contempt if one does not succeed, and hatred if one does. There is something degrading in success

itself when we are forced to encourage those Italian mountebanks to turn the serious into ridicule and spoil good writing by buffoonery.

No one is better able than you to form an opinion on the profession you adorn. But is not your noble art just as much decried by bigots and equally looked down upon at Court? Is less contempt poured on a business which requires intelligence, education, talent, than on a study and art which teach only morality, decency, and the virtues?

I have always been indignant for both you and myself that work so difficult and so useful as ours should be repaid by so much ingratitude, but now my indignation has turned to despair. I shall never reform the abuses of the world: I had better give up trying. The public is a ferocious beast: one must chain him up or flee from him. Chains I have none, but I know the secret of retirement. I have found out the blessedness of quiet—which is true happiness. Shall I leave it to be torn to pieces by the Abbé Desfontaines and to be sacrificed by the Italian buffoons to the malignity of the public and the laughter of the rabble? I ought rather to persuade you to leave an ungrateful profession, that you may no more incite me to expose myself on the boards. I must add to all I have just said that I find it impossible to work

well in my present state of discouragement. I require to be intoxicated with self-approval and enthusiasm—a wine I have mixed, and now no longer care to drink.

Only you have the power to inebriate me afresh: but though you have a pious zeal to make converts, you will find plenty of more suitable subjects in Paris—younger, bolder, cleverer.

Seductive Thalia, leave me in peace! I shall love you just as much as if I owed to your energies the success of a couple of plays a year. Do not tempt me: do not fan a flame I would fain extinguish: do not abuse your power! Your letter very nearly made me think of a plot for a tragedy: a second letter, and I shall be writing verses. Leave me my senses, I entreat you. Alas! I have so few! Goodbye; the little black dogs present their compliments. We call one Zamore and the other Alzire. What names! everything suggests tragedy.

No one is more tenderly attached to you than I am.

V.

Mme. du Châtelet's kindest regards. Once again, Mademoiselle, only warmest remembrances.

XX

ON THE FRENCH AND ENGLISH

To the Abbé le Blanc

[*The Abbé le Blanc* had published a work on England, which he knew well.]

CIREY, November 11, 1738.

You have, sir, a thousand claims on my esteem and friendship—you are an Englishman, you are the author of *Aben-said*, you are a lover of truth and of the arts, and you have chastised the Abbé Desfontaines. I do not doubt that you have improved your talents by your study of that language in which some of the noblest of human thoughts have found expression. You must have felt freer and more at ease in London, for it is there Nature produces the virile beauties which owe nothing to art. Grace, correctness, charm, acuteness are the characteristics of France. . . . I believe that an Englishman who thoroughly knows France, and a Frenchman who thoroughly knows England, are both the better for that knowledge. You, sir, are especially formed to unite the merits of the country you have visited to those of your own motherland. . . .

XXI

ON TREACHERY

To M. Thériot

[Since 1735 Voltaire had been engaged in a passionate war of words with *Desfontaines*—ex-abbé, journalist, and a person of scurrilous reputation, whom Voltaire had loaded with benefits and from whom he had received nothing but injuries. Finally, Desfontaines, out of malice prepense, published in a weekly Parisian newspaper which he edited, some verses, written by Algarotti—Italian savant, friend of Prince Frederick, and visitor at Cirey—in which the real relationship between Voltaire and Mme. du Châtelet stood confessed. Voltaire, stung to defend the honour of his mistress, attacked Desfontaines in a cutting pamphlet, the *Préservatif;* which Desfontaines answered by his *Voltairomanie*—"the howl of a mad dog"—falling on Voltaire's past and present with an unclean fury. In it, Desfontaines cited Thériot, Voltaire's oldest friend and literary confidant, as having totally denied a statement which Voltaire had made in the *Préservatif* to the effect that Thériot had seen a libel Desfontaines had written against his benefactor—Voltaire being thus declared a

liar. In the following letter he appeals to Thériot—a lazy and worthless person whom Voltaire made his usual mistake of overestimating—to speak up like a man and right the wrong. In the sequel, some sort of public retractation *was* wrung out of him: Voltaire brought a suit against Desfontaines and won it: and Thériot was forgiven and restored to a friendship and favour he was far from deserving.

"*His Royal Highness*" was, of course, Prince Frederick of Prussia; Voltaire had asked of him a pension for Thériot.

"*The League*"—the *Henriade*.

"*M. d'Argental*"—the Comte d'Argental, a school, and lifelong, friend of Voltaire. He commonly spoke of d'Argental and his wife as his "guardian angels."]

CIREY, January 2, 1739.

Twenty years ago, my dear friend, I became a public man through my books; as such, it is my duty to reply to public calumnies.

For twenty years I have been your friend, bound to you by the closest ties. Your reputation is much to me, as, I am quite sure, mine is to you; and my letters to his Royal Highness prove that I have faithfully discharged that sacred duty of friendship—to promote the welfare of one's friends.

To-day a man, universally hated for his crimes, a man justly reproached with ingratitude towards me, dares to treat me as an impudent liar when he is accused of publishing a libel on me—as a reward for my kindness to him. He cites your testimony, asserts in print that you deny your friend and are ashamed of him.

It was from you alone that I learnt that the Abbé Desfontaines, when he was in the Bicêtre, wrote a libel on me: from you alone I learnt that this libel was of an abominably malicious character, and entitled *The Apology of Sieur Voltaire*. Not only did you speak of it to us when you stayed at Cirey, in the presence of the Marquis du Châtelet, who confirms my words, but, in looking through your letters, this is what I read in that of August 16, 1726:

"That scoundrel, the Abbé Desfontaines, is always trying to embroil me with you: he says you have never spoken of me to him save in outrageous terms, etc.

"His only income is four hundred livres: but he earns more than a thousand écus a year by his lies and treacheries. In his Bicêtre days he wrote a satirical work against you, which I made him put into the fire: and it was he who published an edition of the 'League' in which he had inserted malicious lines of his own."

I have other letters from you in which you speak of him as strongly.

How comes it, then, that he has the impudence to say that you disavow what you have both said and written to me many times? That he should deny a treachery he himself confessed to me, for which he asked my pardon, and into which he fell a second time, is to be expected from his character: but that he should bring against me the authenticated testimony of my friend and, in order to prove me a calumniator, libel me by your lips—can you bear it?

This is a case in which honour is at stake. You intervene in it as a witness; as a part, a half of myself. The public is judge: the documents must be laid before it. You surely will not say: "This quarrel is nothing to do with me. I am a private person, who wishes to live in peace and ease. I shall not commit myself." Those who give you such advice wish you to do a deed of which your soul is incapable. Surely, it shall never be said that you have betrayed me, that you disavow your word, your signature, and the common knowledge: that you abandon the honour (so closely allied to your own) of your friend of twenty years. And for what? For a scoundrel who has earned public reprobation, for your very enemy, for a man who has insulted you a hun-

dred times, and whose dishonouring abuse of you is actually in print in his *Dictionary of New Words*.

What would be the surprise and indignation of the Prince Royal, whose kindness to me is so marked, and who has himself deigned to testify in writing the horror with which the Abbé Desfontaines inspires him? What would be the feelings of Mme. du Châtelet, of all my friends—I venture to say, of the world? Consult M. d'Argental: ask of your own age: if it be possible, look into the next—look, I say, and see if it will then be better for you to have abandoned your friend and the truth for Desfontaines, and to be more afraid of fresh insults from that wretch than the shame of being publicly false to friendship, to truth, to the most sacred of social obligations. No! you will never have to reproach yourself thus.

You will show that strength and nobility of soul which I expect from you: even the honour of openly taking the part of a friend will not enter into your calculations. Friendship alone will prompt you. I am sure of it, and my heart tells me that yours will respond. Friendship alone, without any other consideration, will win the day. Friendship and truth *must* triumph over hatred and perfidy.

It is with these feelings, and in these sure

hopes, that I bid you farewell with more than common tenderness.

XXII

HOW TO WRITE VERSE

To M. Helvétius

[*Helvétius* was to become the author of one of the most famous books of the eighteenth century, *On the Mind* (*De l'Esprit*), whose frank materialism, adorned by the most easy and entertaining style, disgusted even that materialistic age, and particularly disgusted Voltaire. At the date of this letter, however, Helvétius was only twenty-four, a young man about town, gallant, delightful, just made Farmer-General, and seeking to woo fame by rhymed *Epistles* on *The Love of Study* and on *Happiness*. But not even the generous encouragement and the careful and illuminating criticism of a Voltaire could make those stilted verses poetry, and Helvétius evidently waited till he took to prose to profit by Voltaire's advice and try to write simply instead of trying to write finely.

Shortly after the date of this letter, he was a guest at Cirey, and the friendship between him

and his monitor was confirmed: though to Voltaire, with his burning and active pity for the oppressed, the Farmers-General — those extortionate tax-gatherers of old France—were a class wholly odious. But Helvétius, whose heart was as much better than his profession as his mind was above his book on it, used his office to plead in high places for the poor, and in 1751 renounced it, proving "he was not insatiable like the rest of them."

When, in 1759, *On the Mind* was burnt by the public hangman in company with Voltaire's poem *On Natural Law*, though he had soundly hated (and roundly abused) Helvétius' masterpiece, he fought for its right to live, tooth and nail, up hill and down dale, on the essentially Voltairean principle: "I wholly disapprove of what you say —and will defend to the death your right to say it."]

CIREY, February 25, 1739.

My dear friend—the friend of Truth and the Muses—your *Epistle* is full of bold reasoning in advance of your age, and still more in advance of those craven writers who rhyme for the booksellers and restrict themselves within the compass of a royal censor, who is either jealous of them, or more cowardly than they are themselves.

What are they but miserable birds, with their wings close clipped, who, longing to soar, are for ever falling back to earth, breaking their legs! You have a fearless genius, and your work sparkles with imagination. I much prefer your generous faults to the mediocre prettinesses with which we are cloyed. If you will allow me to tell you where I think you can improve yourself in your art, I should say: Beware, lest in attempting the grand, you overshoot the mark and fall into the grandiose: only employ true similes: and be sure always to use exactly the right word.

Shall I give you an infallible little rule for verse? Here it is. When a thought is just and noble, something still remains to be done with it: see if the way you have expressed it in verse would be effective in prose: and if your verse, without the swing of the rhyme, seems to you to have a word too many—if there is the least defect in the construction—if a conjunction is forgotten—if, in brief, the right word is not used, or not used in the right place, you must then conclude that the jewel of your thought is not well set. Be quite sure that lines which have any one of these faults will never be learnt by heart, and never re-read: and the only good verses are those which one re-reads and remembers, in spite of oneself. There are many of this kind in your "Epistle"—lines

which no one else in this generation can write at your age—such as were written fifty years ago.

Do not be afraid, then, to bring your talents to Parnassus; they will undoubtedly redound to your credit because you never neglect your duties for them: they are themselves very pleasant duties. Surely, those your position demand of you must be very uncongenial to such a nature as yours. They are as much routine as looking after a house, or the housebook of one's steward. Why should you be deprived of liberty of thought because you happen to be a farmer-general? Atticus was a farmer-general, the old Romans were farmers-general, and they thought—as Romans. Go ahead, Atticus.

XXIII

ON THE SAME SUBJECT, AND ON BOILEAU

To M. Helvétius

[*Boileau-Despréaux*, the seventeenth century poet and critic, was remarkable, as Voltaire here says, for doing excellently well, in a limited sphere. His neat, regular, and vigorous lines remind one of Pope, who imitated Boileau's masterpiece *L'Art*

Poétique in his *Essay on Criticism*, and Boileau's *Lutrin* in the *Rape of the Lock*.]

BRUSSELS, June 20, 1741.

I greatly reproach myself for my laziness, my dear friend, but I have been for a whole month so unworthily occupied in prose that I hardly dare write to you of verse. My imagination is weighed down by studies which are to poetry what dark and dusty old furniture is to a gaily-lit ballroom. I must shake off the dust to reply to you.

You have written to me a letter in which I recognise your genius. You find Boileau fairly clever: I agree with you that he has neither sublimity nor a very brilliant imagination; but he has done exceedingly well what he could do, and what he set out to do. He has put good sense into melodious verse; he is clear, logical, easy, and agreeable in his transitions; he never soars high, or falls low. His subjects are not suitable for the dignified treatment yours deserve. You have realised what your talent is, just as he realised his. You are a philosopher, you see everything life-size, your brush is bold and big. So far, nature has made you (I say it in all sincerity) greatly Despréaux's superior: but your talents, fine as they are, will be nothing without his. You

have so much the more need of his correctness because the breadth of your thoughts is less tolerant of circumstriction. It is no trouble to you to think, but much to write. I shall therefore never cease to preach to you that art of writing which Despréaux knew and taught so well, the respect for our language, the sequence of ideas, the easy manner in which he carries his reader with him, the naturalness which is the result of art, and the appearance of ease which involves such hard work. A word out of place spoils the finest thought. Boileau's ideas—I confess it once more—are never fine, but they are never ill set out: so, to be better than he is, it is essential to begin by writing as clearly and correctly.

No false steps can be permitted in your stately measure: in a little minuet they would not matter. You sparkle with precious stones; his dress is simple but well made. Your diamonds must be in good order lest your diadem shame you. Send me then, dear friend, something which is as well worked out as it is nobly conceived: do not disdain to be at once the owner of the mine and the gold digger. You know, by my writing to you thus, how great an interest I feel in your reputation, and that of the arts. Your last visit has doubled my regard for you. It really looks as if I should stop writing verses, and content

myself with admiring yours. Mme. du Châtelet, who has written to you, sends kindest regards. Goodbye, yours for ever.

XXIV

ON BRITISH TOLERANCE

To M. César de Missy

[*M. de Missy* was the chaplain of the French Church of St. James's in London.

Voltaire's tragedy, *Fanaticism, or Mahomet the Prophet*, had been produced on August 19th of the year 1742 to a crowded and enthusiastic audience in Paris. But its attack upon bigotry and intolerance was indeed, as the author himself said, too outspoken for the French authorities, who, without reading a line of it, declared it "infamous, wicked, irreligious, blasphemous," and after four performances demanded its withdrawal. Voltaire, wholly disgusted, left Paris for Brussels with Mme. du Châtelet on August 29th, and spent his time there in sitting up in bed—for he was ill, as usual—making a fair and correct copy of the play to send to Frederick (by now King Frederick of Prussia) and in writing to M. César de Missy.]

BRUSSELS, September 1, 1742.

I found, sir, on my return to Brussels, a very welcome letter from you: to which I only reply in vile prose, in order that you may have it the sooner. I do not know if the country you have adopted as yours has become the enemy of the one which chance of birth made mine: but I do know that minds which think like yours are all my countrymen and my friends. I beg you then, sir, to prove your friendship by sending me as much of the *Universal History* as has so far appeared in English. . . .

A little while ago a small edition of my works was published in Paris, under the title of the Genevan edition; publishers, Bousquet; it is the least incorrect and the most complete I have seen. I have ordered some copies, and shall have the honour of sending you one.

If any publisher in London likes to reprint them, I will send him corrected proofs, in good order, accompanied by some curious little papers which have not yet appeared: above all, by my tragedy of *Mahomet*, or *Fanaticism*, which is a great Tartufe, so the fanatics have stopped its being played in Paris, just as the pious tried to smother the other "Tartuffe" at his birth. My tragedy is suited, I believe, rather to English heads than French hearts. Paris found it too

daring, because it is strong: and dangerous, because it is truthful. I tried to show in it into what horrible excesses fanaticism, led by an impostor, can plunge weak minds.

My piece represents, under the guise of Mahomet, the Prior of the Jacobins giving the dagger to Jacques Clément, who is further incited to that crime by his mistress. The author of the *Henriade* was recognized in the work; and he *must* be persecuted: for he loves truth and humankind. It is only in London that poets are allowed to be philosophers.

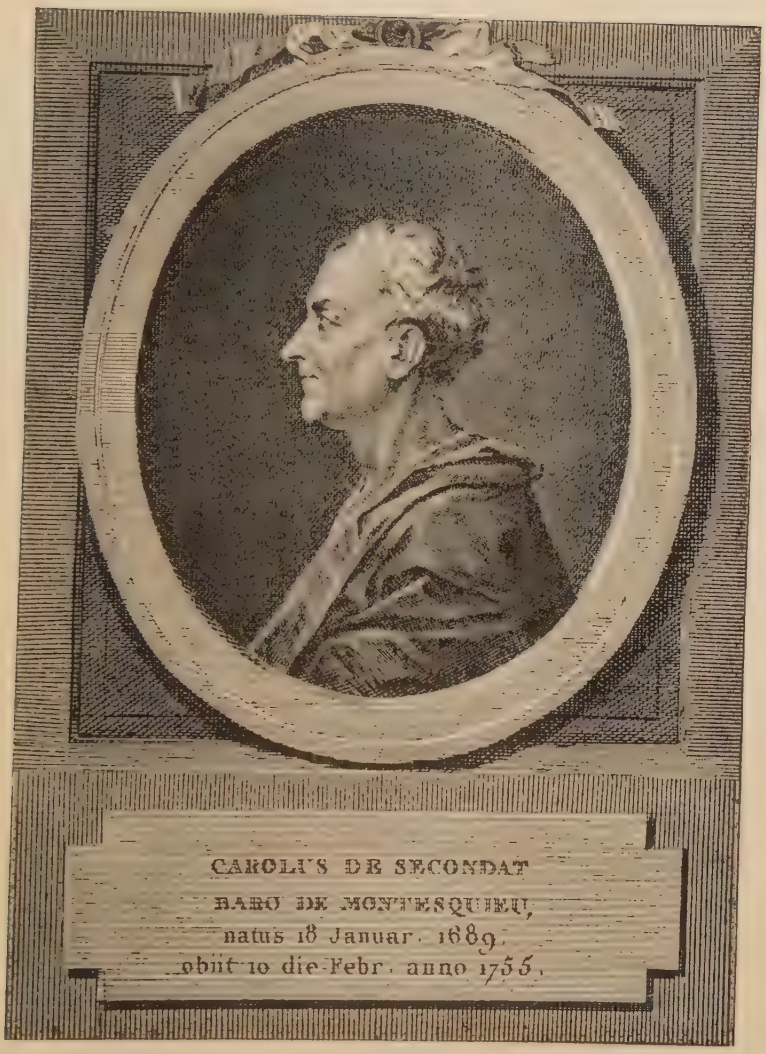
My compliments to M. Nancy, from whom I have received a letter. Farewell, sir: you may depend on my gratitude and affection.

XXV

ON CORNEILLE AND RACINE

To M. de Vauvenargues

[*Vauvenargues*, who became the famous author of some of the wisest and most delicately beautiful maxims even in the French language—that language of the maxim *par excellence*—was at the date of this letter a handsome young soldier of



MONTESQUIEU, AUTHOR OF "LES LETTRES PERSANES" AND "L'ESPRIT DES LOIS."

From the portrait by Benoist

eight and twenty, who had been with Marshal Villars on his last Italian campaign, and in Bohemia with Belle-Isle, where in 1742 he had endured with his regiment all the horrors of the great midwinter march from Prague to Egra. He returned to Paris with his health utterly ruined: but purposing not the less to rejoin his regiment in Germany, which purpose he effected, and fought at Dettingen. It was during this interlude in Paris that he introduced himself to Voltaire in a letter in which he expressed his preference for Racine over Corneille.

After the campaign of '42, when Vauvenargues had become a complete invalid, their friendship was resumed: and it was on Voltaire's advice that Vauvenargues took up literature as a profession, and so gave the world that slender volume, containing only the *Maxims* and a few *Counsels and Reflections*, which in its strong sense, serenity, courage, and sweetness remains for ever the noblest inspiration to Do What One Can. To the last a most patient sufferer, his life ended at the early age of thirty-two: Voltaire's respect and reverence for him died only with his own death.

"*The Persian Letters*"—*Les Lettres Persanes*—were the first great literary success of the famous Montesquieu, the celebrated writer on law and

politics. Though extremely lively and satirical, the *Letters* are not without the weightier observations which distinguish the later work by which Montesquieu chiefly lives, *L'Esprit des Lois* (see Letter LVI, "A Profession of Faith"). The judgment of posterity has confirmed Voltaire's that Montesquieu's "little book on the Decadence of the Romans" was a far more solid and able work than *The Persian Letters*.]

PARIS, April 15, 1743.

I had the honour to tell the Duc de Duras yesterday that I had just received a letter from a wit and a philosopher, who was at the same time captain in the King's Regiment. He at once guessed it must be M. de Vauvenargues. It would indeed be very difficult to find two persons capable of writing such a letter, and, since I have known what taste is, I have seen nothing so delicate and so thoughtful as the words you have sent me.

There were not four men in the last century who dared to confess that Corneille was often nothing but a declaimer: you, sir, feel and express this fact as a man of truth and enlightenment. I am not surprised that a mind as sagacious and

critical as yours should prefer the art of Racine —his eloquent wisdom (always the master of his feelings) which makes him say what is to be said as it ought to be said: but, at the same time, I am persuaded that the same good taste, which has made you feel the superiority of the art of Racine, must make you admire the genius of Corneille, who created tragedy in a barbarous age. Inventors take, most rightly, the highest rank in fame.

. . .

The beautiful scene of Horace and Curiace, the two charming scenes from the *Cid*, much of *Cinna*, the part of Sévère, almost all Pauline's, and half the last act of *Rodogune*, would bear comparison with *Athalie* even if they had been written to-day. How then should we regard them when we consider the times in which Corneille wrote? I have always said: *In domo patris mei mansiones multæ sunt.* Molière has not prevented me from appreciating Destouches' *Glorieux: Rhadamiste* has moved me even after *Phèdre*. Such a man as you, sir, should have preferences, but no exclusions.

You are right, I think, to condemn the wise Despréaux for comparing Voiture to Horace. Voiture's reputation deserves to decline, because he is hardly ever natural, and his few attractions are of a trifling and frivolous nature. But

there are sublime things in Corneille, in the midst of his frigid reasoning; and sometimes things so touching that he must needs be respected with all his drawbacks. Leonardo da Vinci is lovable even beside Titian and Paul Veronese.

I am aware, sir, the public does not sufficiently realise Corneille's faults: it mistakes some of them for his few and exquisite beauties.

Time alone adjusts values: the ordinary reader is always dazzled at first.

We began by being wildly enthusiastic over those *Persian Letters* of which you were speaking, and neglected the little *Decadence of the Romans* by the same author. Now, however, all the best judges acclaim the excellent good sense of the latter book, at first despised, and think little of that imaginative trifle, the *Persian Letters*, whose occasional daring is its chief merit. The majority of critics fall in, in the long run, with the opinions of the enlightened few: you, sir, are made to lead that minority. I am grieved that the soldier's career which you have chosen keeps you from a city where I might have benefited by your knowledge: but the same just mind which makes you prefer the restraint of Racine to the exuberance of Corneille, and the wisdom of Locke to the wordiness of Bayle, will serve you well in your

own profession, as everywhere and in everything. . . .

VOLTAIRE.

XXVI

CRITICISING A CRITIC

To M. Martin Kahle

1744.

I am very pleased to hear, sir, that you have written a little book against me. You do me too much honour. On page 17 you reject the proof, from final causes, of the existence of God. If you had argued thus at Rome, the reverend father and governor of the Holy Palace would have condemned you to the Inquisition: if you had written thus against a theologian of Paris, he would have had your proposition censured by the sacred faculty: if against a devout person, he would have abused you: but I have the honour to be neither a Jesuit, nor a theologian, nor a devotee. I shall leave you to your opinion, and shall remain of mine. I shall always be convinced that a watch proves a watchmaker, and that the universe proves a God. I hope that you yourself understand what you say concerning space and eternity, the necessity of matter,

and preordained harmony: and I recommend you to look once more at what *I* said, finally, in the new edition, where I earnestly endeavoured to make myself thoroughly understood—and in metaphysics that is no easy task.

You quote, à propos of space and infinity, the *Medea* of Seneca, the *Philippics* of Cicero, and the *Metamorphoses* of Ovid; also the verses of the Duke of Buckingham, of Gombaud, Regnier, and Rapin. I must tell you, sir, I know at least as much poetry as you do: that I am quite as fond of it: that if it comes to capping verses we shall see some very pretty sport: only I do not think them suitable to shed light on a metaphysical question, be they Lucretius' or the Cardinal de Polignac's.

Furthermore, if ever you understand anything about preordained harmony—if you discover how, under the law of necessity, man is free, you will do me a service if you will pass on the information to me. When you have shown, in verse or otherwise, why so many men cut their throats in the best of all possible worlds, I shall be exceedingly obliged to you.

I await your arguments, your verses, and your abuse: and assure you from the bottom of my heart that neither you nor I know anything about the matter. I have the honour to be, etc.

XXVII

ON THE BLIND

To M. Diderot

[*Diderot*—the brilliant ne'er-do-weel of the philosophic party and, to be, the hot-headed and hot-hearted instigator of the great Encyclopædia, the book "that was all books"—in 1749 wrote his famous *Letter on the Blind for the Use of Those Who See* and sent it to Voltaire as the chief of that party of which his own *Philosophical Thoughts*, published four years earlier, had proclaimed him a member. Voltaire's letter in reply reveals his own deism, as it reveals Diderot's atheism, and explains the meaning of the jesting epithet "cagot" = bigot —which Diderot so often applied to Voltaire. Diderot's *Letter* contained unfortunately a sneer at the expense of a fine lady, the *chère amie of* a minister of state, and so presently imprisoned him in Vincennes: from whence Mme. du Châtelet (who was a near relation of the governor of the fortress), urged by Voltaire, speedily obtained his release. Diderot, though he was Voltaire's correspondent for twenty-nine years, never saw him until 1778, when Voltaire was on his last triumphant visit to Paris, and Diderot was himself growing old.

"*The book I send you*" was the *Elements of Newton's Philosophy*.

"*Saunderson, who denies a God because he was born sightless,*" was the subject of a successful operation for cataract which had inspired Diderot's *Letter*, Diderot himself being of the opinion that, to a man born blind, atheism was a natural religion.

"*Before I leave Lunéville,*" where Voltaire was staying at the court of Stanislas, ex-King of Poland.]

June, 1749.

I thank you, sir, for the profound and brilliant work you have been so good as to send me: the book I send you is neither the one nor the other, but in it you will find the anecdote of the man born blind set forth in greater detail than in the earlier editions. I am entirely of your opinion as to what you say respecting the judgment formed in such a case by ordinary men of average good sense, and that formed by philosophers. I am sorry that in the examples you quote you have forgotten the case of the blind who, receiving the gift of sight, saw men as trees walking.

I have read your book with great pleasure. It says much, and gives still more to be understood. I have long honoured you as much as I despise the stupid vandals who condemn what they do not

understand, and the wicked who unite themselves with the fools to denounce those who are trying to enlighten them.

But I confess I am not at all of the opinion of Saunderson, who denies a God because he was born sightless. I am, perhaps, mistaken, but, in his place, I should recognise a great Intelligence who had given me so many substitutes for sight, and perceiving, on reflection, the wonderful relations between all things, I should have suspected a Workman, infinitely able. If it is very presumptuous to pretend to divine *what* He is, and *why* He has made everything that exists, so it seems to me very presumptuous to deny *that* He is.

I am exceedingly anxious to meet and talk with you, whether you think yourself one of His works, or a particle drawn, of necessity, from matter, eternal and necessary. Whatever you are, you are a worthy part of that great whole which I do not understand.

I very much wish, before I leave Lunéville, you would do me the honour to join a philosophers' feast at my table with a few other wise men. I am not one myself, but I have a passion for them when they are wise after your fashion. Rest assured, sir, that I appreciate your merits, and that to render them fuller justice I long to see you and assure you etc., etc.

XXVIII

ON THE DEATH OF MME. DU CHÂTELET

To Mme. du Boccage

[*Mme. du Boccage*, a pretty and charming woman, was greatly overrated as a poetess by almost all her contemporaries, including Voltaire. "*Your translation of Milton*" was her imitation of *Paradise Lost* which she called *Le Paradis Terrestre*. Her *Letters*, written on her travels, are much her best performance. In 1758, she was Voltaire's guest at Ferney.

In September, 1749, *Mme. du Châtelet*, with whom Voltaire's connection had lasted for fifteen years, died suddenly, in childbirth, at the Court of King Stanislas at Lunéville, while she, Voltaire, and the Marquis de Saint Lambert, who was now her lover, were on a visit there. Faithless to Voltaire as she had been, that he sincerely and passionately regretted her death and the loss of her clever and stimulating companionship, the two following letters bear evidence.

"*A wretch named Roi.*" Roi, or Roy, was a scurrilous old poet who, in 1745–6, jealous of Voltaire's election to the French Academy, had burlesqued and lampooned him; and whom Voltaire had not been wise enough to treat with the silence of con-

tempt. Roi saw in Mme. du Châtelet's death the chance to sting afresh.]

PARIS, October 12, 1749.

I have just arrived in Paris, madam: the greatness of my sorrow and my wretched health shall not prevent my at once assuring you how deeply I feel your kindness. A mind as noble as yours must needs regret such a woman as Mme. du Châtelet. She was an honour to her sex and to France. She was to philosophy what you are to literature: and although she had just translated and simplified Newton—that is to say, done what, at most, three or four men in France would have dared to attempt—she also regularly cultivated, by reading lighter books, the splendid intelligence which nature had given her. Alas, madam! it was but four days before her death that I re-read your tragedy with her. We had also read together your translation of Milton, with the original. You would regret her yet more had you been present at this reading. She rendered you justice: you had no more sincere admirer. Just after her death there appeared a feeble quatrain belauding her. People with neither taste nor feeling ascribed it to me. Any one who could suppose that in the depth of my grief I should feel inclined to write verses on her must be himself unworthy of friendship, or exceedingly light minded:

but what is much more horrible and culpable is that a wretch, named Roi, has actually dared to lampoon her.

I know, madam, only one thing against your character—to have been the object of that miserable creature's flattery. Society should unite to exterminate him. Was not my misery great enough, without that horror to crown it? Farewell, madam . . . .

XXIX

ON THE SAME SUBJECT

To M. d'Arnaud

[*Baculard d'Arnaud* was a conceited and very mediocre young poet whom Voltaire had helped with gifts of money and for whom he had procured the post of Paris correspondent to King Frederick the Great. For several years before the death of Mme. du Châtelet Frederick had been trying to tempt Voltaire from France to Potsdam: she successfully opposed that desertion: but the phrase in this letter, "I am very far from going to Prussia," certainly means, "I am not so far from it as I used to be," and Frederick was already endeavouring by compliments and pensions to his protégé, d'Arnaud, to pique Voltaire to accept them for himself.]

PARIS, October 14, 1749.

My dear boy, a woman who translàted Virgil, who translated and simplified Newton, and yet was perfectly unassuming in conversation and manner: a woman who never spoke ill of anyone and never uttered a lie: a constant and fearless friend—in a word, a great man, whom other women only thought of in connection with diamonds and dancing: for such a woman as this you cannot prevent my grieving all my life. I am very far from going to Prussia: I can hardly leave the house. I am much touched by your kindness: I have need of it. . . . Goodbye, my dear Arnaud.

XXX

ARRIVING IN PRUSSIA

To Mme. Denis

[*Mme. Denis*, Voltaire's niece,—now widowed,—had come to keep his house for him in Paris after the death of Mme. du Châtelet. Vulgar, lively, good-natured—the very apotheosis of the commonplace—her uncle's toleration of her can only be accounted for by the fact that genius, or even very great talent, is nearly always generous to mediocrity: and seems to use some of its own wits to discover

those of people usually credited with none. It will be noticed in this letter that Voltaire tried his best to entice his niece to follow him to Prussia: whither he had gone at last, finally spurred to that rash act by the fact that Baculard d'Arnaud was in such high favour there that King Frederick—astutely calculating the effect of such compliments—had written the young gentleman a poem in which Voltaire was alluded to as the setting, and d'Arnaud as the rising, sun. "When a wise man commits a folly, it is not a small one." In all Voltaire's early letters from Prussia, he is, as it were, trying to justify his folly in going there, and to prove it wisdom. This letter was written about a fortnight after his arrival.

"*He treats Popes much better than pretty women.*" Frederick's contempt of the sex was notorious.

"*It is essential that the King, my master, should consent.*" The King of France. Voltaire was still his Gentleman-in-Ordinary. The story ran that when Voltaire had asked permission of him to visit King Frederick, Louis turned his back and said indifferently, "You can go when you please!"]

CHARLOTTENBURG, August 14, 1750.

This is the fact of the matter, my dear child. The King of Prussia is making me his chamberlain,

and giving me one of his orders and a pension of twenty thousand francs, and will settle one of four thousand on you for life if you will come and keep house for me in Berlin, as you do in Paris. You had a very pleasant life at Landau with your husband: I promise you that Berlin is worth many Landaus, and has much better operas. Consider the matter: consult your feelings. You may reply that the King of Prussia must be singularly fond of verses. It is true that he is a purely French writer who happened to be born in Berlin. On consideration, he has come to the conclusion that I shall be of more use to him than d'Arnaud. I have forgiven the gay little rhymes which his Prussian Majesty wrote for my young pupil, in which he spoke of him as the *rising sun*, extremely brilliant: and of me as the *setting sun*, exceedingly feeble. He still sometimes scratches with one hand, while he caresses with the other: but, so near him, I am not afraid. If you consent, he will have both *rising* and *setting* at his side, and in his *high noon* will be writing prose and verse to his heart's content, now he has no more battles on hand. I have but a short time to live. Perhaps it will be pleasanter to die here at Potsdam, in his fashion, than as an ordinary citizen in Paris. You can go back there afterwards with your four thousand francs pension. If these propositions meet your views, you must pack your

boxes in the spring: and, at the end of the autumn, I shall make a pilgrimage to Italy to see St. Peter's at Rome, the Pope, the Venus of Medici, and the buried city. It always lay heavy on my conscience to die without having seen Italy. We will rejoin each other in May. I have four verses by the King of Prussia for His Holiness. It will be very entertaining to take to the Pope four French verses written by a German heretic, and to bring back indulgences to Potsdam. You will see he treats Popes much better than pretty women. He will never write sonnets to you: but you would have excellent company here and a good house. First of all, it is essential that the King, my master, should consent. I believe he will be perfectly indifferent. It matters little to a King of France where the most useless of his twenty-two or twenty-three million of subjects spends his life: but it would be dreadful to live without you.

XXXI

FELICITY IN POTSDAM

To Mme. de Fontaine

[*Mme. de Fontaine*, Voltaire's younger niece, had been married to M. de Fontaine in 1738.

"*I can be much more useful to your brother.*"

This was the Abbé Mignot—fat, good-natured, ordinary.

"'*Mahomet' has put me on such good terms with the Pope.*" Voltaire, in a very astute letter, had asked and obtained permission of His Holiness to lay "a work against the founder of a false religion at the feet of the chief of the true": and beheld himself, with much cynical enjoyment, the protégé of Rome.

"*I shall be acting in 'Rome Sauvée' at Berlin.*" *Rome Sauvée*, written in a fortnight at Lunéville to outvie the *Catilina* of Crébillon,—dismal old rival playwright,—had been first performed before a distinguished audience at Voltaire's house in Paris, just before he left for Prussia. At the second performance he had taken, most successfully, the part of Cicero.]

BERLIN, September 23, 1750.

When you set about it, my dear niece, you write charming letters, and prove yourself one of the most amiable women in the world. You add to my regrets, and make me feel the extent of my losses. I never lacked delightful society when I was in yours. However, I hope even misfortunes may be turned to account. I can be much more useful to your brother here than in Paris. Perhaps a heretic King will protect a Catholic preacher.

All roads lead to Rome, and since *Mahomet* has put me on such good terms with the Pope, I do not despair of a Huguenot doing something for the benefit of a Carmelite.

When I say, my dear niece, that all roads lead to Rome, I do not mean that they will lead *me* there. I was wild to see Rome and our present good Pope: but you and your sister attract me back to France: I sacrifice the Holy Father to you. I wish I could also sacrifice the King of Prussia, but that is impossible. He is as amiable as are you yourselves; he is a king, but his passion for me is of sixteen years' standing: he has turned my head. I had the audacity to think that nature made me for him; I found that there is so remarkable a conformity in our tastes that I forgot he was the lord of half Germany, and that the other half trembled at his name, that he had won five battles, that he was the finest general in Europe, and had about him great monsters of heroes six feet high. All that would, indeed, have made me fly a thousand miles from him: but the philosopher humanised the monarch, and I know him only as a great man, good and kindly. Everybody taunts me with his having written verses for d'Arnaud—which are certainly not among his best: but you must remember that four hundred miles from Paris it is very difficult to judge if a person who has been

recommended to you is, or is not, worthy; that, anyhow, verses, ill or well applied, prove that the conqueror of Austria loves literature; and I love him with all my heart. Besides, d'Arnaud is a good sort of person who, now and again, does light on some pretty lines. He has taste: he is improving; and if he does not improve—well, it is no great matter. In a word, that little slight the King of Prussia put on me does not prevent him being the must agreeable and remarkable of men.

The climate here is not so rigorous as people think. You Parisians talk as if I were in Lapland: let me inform you that we have had a summer quite as hot as yours, that we have enjoyed good peaches and grapes, and that you really have no business to give yourself such airs of superiority on the strength of two or three extra degrees of sunshine.

You will see *Mahomet* acted at my house in Paris: but I shall be acting in *Rome Sauvée* at Berlin—the hoarsest old Cicero you ever heard. Further, my dear child, we must look to our digestions: that is the main point. My health is very much as it was in Paris: when I have the colic, I would see further all the kings of the earth. I have given up the grand suppers, and am a little the better. I am under a great obligation to the King of Prussia: he sets me an example of temperance. What! said I to myself, here is a king born a gour-

mand, who sits at table and eats nothing, and yet is excellent company; while I give myself indigestion like a fool! How I pity you, changing your diet of asses' milk for the waters of Forges and pecking like a sparrow, and, with it all, never well! Compensate yourself: there are other pleasures.

Goodbye: my compliments to everyone. I hope to embrace you in November. I am writing to your sister: but please tell her I shall love her all my life, even better than I do my new master.

XXXII

ON THE SAME SUBJECT

To Mme. Denis

POTSDAM, October 13, 1750.

Behold us in retreat at Potsdam! The excitement of the fêtes is over, and my soul is relieved. I am not sorry to be here with a king who has neither court nor cabinet. It is true Potsdam is full of the moustaches and helmets of grenadiers: thank God, I do not see them. I work peacefully in my rooms, to the accompaniment of the drum. I have given up the royal dinners: there were too many generals and princes. I could not get used to being always opposite a king in state, and to

talking in public. I sup with him, and a very small party. The supper is shorter, gayer, and healthier. I should die at the end of three months of boredom and indigestion if I had to dine every day with a king in state.

I have been handed over, my dear, with all due formalities, to the King of Prussia. The marriage is accomplished: will it be happy? I do not know in the least: yet I cannot prevent myself saying, Yes. After coquetting for so many years, marriage was the necessary end. My heart beat hard even at the altar. I fully intend to come this winter and give you an account of myself, and perhaps bring you back with me. There is no further question of my trip to Italy; I gladly give up for you the Holy Father and the buried city: perhaps I ought also to have sacrificed Potsdam. Who would have guessed, seven or eight months ago, when I was making every arrangement to live with you in Paris, that I should settle three hundred miles away in someone else's house? and that someone else a master. He has solemnly sworn that I shall not repent it: he has included you, my dear child, in a sort of contract he signed which I will bring with me: but do you intend to earn your dowry of four thousand francs?

I am much afraid you will be like Mme. de Rottemberg, who always preferred the operas of Paris

to those of Berlin. Oh, destiny! destiny! how you rule all things and dispose of poor humanity.

It is rather amusing that the same literary men in Paris, who longed to exterminate me, are now calling out against my absence—as desertion. They are sorry to have lost their victim. I was indeed wrong to leave you: my heart tells me so daily, more often than you think: but I have done very well to escape those gentry.

Goodbye—with regrets and affection.

XXXIII

THE LITTLE RIFT WITHIN THE LUTE

To Mme. Denis

["*Prince Henry is a most amiable man.*" Prince Henry of Prussia, brother of King Frederick.

"*Mme. Tyrconnel*" was the wife of the French ambassador to Berlin, Lord Tyrconnel, who was an Irishman, famous for his good suppers.

"*Isaac d'Argens,*" a witty and profligate French marquis, formerly a guest at King Frederick's supper-parties.

"*Maupertuis,*" President of the Berlin Academy, well known as a very self-satisfied and pompous geometrician, soon to be better known by his famous quarrel with Voltaire and to be made

eternally ridiculous as the *Akakia* of Voltaire's cutting *Diatribe.* He had taught Mme. du Châtelet mathematics and been a visitor at Cirey: and already, in October, 1750, had had a tiff with Voltaire over a vacant chair in the Berlin Academy —Voltaire winning the chair for his protégé, Maupertuis was left more than "*a little*" jealous.

"*A man who is only too lively: La Mettrie*"—a wild free-thinker and a French doctor of medicine. His book was entitled *The Man-Machine*, and proved, entirely to his own satisfaction, the material nature of the soul.]

POTSDAM, November 6, 1750.

Paris has learnt, then, my dear, that we have played the *Death of Cæsar* at Potsdam, that Prince Henry is a most amiable man, a good actor, with no accent, and very pleasant: and that everything here is exceedingly agreeable. Quite true . . . but . . . the King's suppers are delicious, the conversation clever, witty, informing: perfect liberty prevails: he is the soul of everything: no bad temper, not a cloud, or, at least, not a storm. My life is free and busy; but . . . but . . . operas, comedies, fêtes, suppers at Sans Souci, military manœuvres, concerts, study, reading; but . . . but . . . the city of Berlin, huge, better opened up than Paris, palaces, theatres, affable queens, charming princesses, beautiful maids-of-honour,

the house of Mme. Tyrconnel always full, sometimes too full; but . . . but, my dear child, the weather begins to be cold and frosty.

I am in the mood for Buts, so I will add: But it is impossible for me to get away before December 15th. You may be sure that I am dying to see you, embrace you, and talk to you. My longing to go to Italy is not nearly so strong as my desire to return to you: but, my dear, give me one more month, ask M. d'Argental to grant me this favour: for I always tell the King of Prussia that, though I am his chamberlain, I belong not the less to you and to M. d'Argental. But is it true our Isaac d'Argens has gone to bury himself at Monaco, with his wife who is an artist? That seems to be a little foolish—or extremely philosophical. He would do better to come here and add to our colony.

Maupertuis' energies are not very pleasing: he takes my measure most rigidly with his mathematical implements. They say a little jealousy creeps into his problems. But to make up there is a man here who is only too lively: La Mettrie.

His ideas are perfect fireworks—in fact, skyrockets. His noise is very amusing for the first quarter of an hour, and mortally wearisome afterwards. He has just written (without knowing it) a vile book printed at Potsdam, in which he proscribes virtue and repentance, praises vice, and

invites the reader to all sorts of wickedness—without any evil intention. The book contains not half a page of sense, and a thousand flashes of light—lightnings in the dark. Sensible people have pointed out to him the enormity of his immorality. He was wholly astonished: he had not the least idea of the nature of what he had written: he is always ready to contradict himself the next day, if they like. The Lord preserve me from having him as my doctor! he would give me corrosive sublimate instead of rhubarb, most innocently, and then roar with laughter. This remarkable physician is reader to the King: and what is still richer, is now reading him a History of the Church. He skips hundreds of pages, and there are places when monarch and reader nearly kill themselves with laughing.

Goodbye, my dear child: they want to play *Rome Sauvée* in Paris, do they? but . . . but . . . Goodbye. My warmest love to you.

XXXIV

THE FAVOUR OF KINGS

To Mme. Denis

[Baculard d'Arnaud, who had had his head turned by the favours of King Frederick, in 1750

allied himself with Fréron—journalist of Paris and bitter enemy of Voltaire—to write against him. Voltaire retaliated by obtaining from Frederick d'Arnaud's dismissal from Potsdam. But the victory was a cause for reflection rather than for triumph.

"*There has not been so terrible a fall since 'Belisaire.'*" The once popular, and now forgotten, political novel by Marmontel contained a too daring chapter on toleration, which earned the fury and condemnation of the Sorbonne (see Letter LXV, "On the Jesuits and Catherine the Great"). Marmontel owed his first start in life and the profession of letters to Voltaire: who always remained his friend and too generous admirer.]

November 24, 1750.

The rising sun has set. Poor d'Arnaud was mortally bored here seeing neither King nor actress—nor anything except bayonets in front of his house. He presumed on his credit by having his comedy, the *Mauvais Riche*, played at Charlottenburg: but pieces taken from the New Testament do not succeed here: it was badly received. . . . All this, added to a little annoyance in seeing me, the setting sun, passably well treated, decided him to ask, regretfully, for leave of absence. The King

sharply ordered him to go in twenty-four hours, and, kings always being so busy, forgot to pay his travelling expenses. My dear, my triumph saddens me—it makes me reflect deeply on the perils of greatness. This d'Arnaud had one of the most delightful sinecures in the kingdom. He was boy-poet to the King, and his Prussian Majesty had written most complimentary little verses to him. There has not been so terrible a fall since *Bélisaire*. What a treatment for the monarch to mete to one of his two suns. . . . He palavers me more than ever: but . . . goodbye: goodbye: I long to see you.

XXXV

ON INSPIRATION

To King Frederick

[At the end of 1750, a quarrel with Hirsch, a Jew money lender of Berlin, had robbed Voltaire of the royal favour. A reconciliation followed: and Voltaire was once more restored to his post of literary adviser to the King. The following is a specimen of hundreds of notes which passed between them when they were both at Potsdam, separated only by a few rooms.]

POTSDAM, August, 1751.

Sire, I return your Majesty the first volume: I am not the person who has spilled the ink all over it. Just a word on the feebleness of the human intelligence: I re-wrote to-day, in five different forms, a little passage of the *Henriade*, without being able to turn it as I did a month ago. What does that prove? That one's powers are never the same; that one never has exactly the same idea twice in one's life; that one must always be ready to seize the right moment. What a devil of a profession! but it has its charms: and a busy solitude is, I think, the happiest life of all. My poor exhausted muse humbly kisses the feet and wings of yours.

XXXVI

THE RIFT WIDENS

To Mme. Denis

[*"He is imploring me to get M. Richelieu to obtain a permit for him."* La Mettrie had been banished from France for his writings: and a permit was necessary to enable him to return.

"You will take me for M. Jourdain," who is of course the immortal hero of Molière's *Bourgeois Gentilhomme*.]

BERLIN, September 1, 1751.

I have just time, my dear, to send you a fresh packet of letters. You will find in it one from La Mettrie to the Maréchal de Richelieu, asking his good offices. Reader though he be to the King of Prussia, he is dying to return to France. This cheerful soul, supposed to do nothing but laugh, cries like a child at having to be here. He is imploring me to get M. Richelieu to obtain a permit for him. It is certainly a fact that one must never judge by appearances.

La Mettrie, in his writings, boasts of his delight at being near a great king, who sometimes reads his verses: in private, he weeps with me. He is ready to go back on foot: but as for me! . . . what am *I* here for? I am going to astonish you.

This La Mettrie is a person of no importance, and chats familiarly with the King after their readings. He tells me much in confidence; and swears that, talking to the King a few days ago of the so-called favour extended to me and the little jealousy it excites, the King replied, "I shall want him a year longer, at the outside: one squeezes the orange and throws away the peel."

I repeated these charming words to myself: I redoubled my questions: La Mettrie redoubled his assertions. Would you believe it? ought I to believe it? is it possible? What! after sixteen years

of kindnesses, promises, protestations: after the letter which he desired that you should keep as an inviolable pledge of his word! And at a time, if you please, at a time when I am sacrificing everything to serve him, when I not only correct his works, but write in the margin, à propos of any little faults I detect, reflections on our language which are a lesson in the arts of poesy and rhetoric: having, as my sole aim, to assist his talent, enlighten him and put him in a position to do without my help!

I certainly took both pride and pleasure in cultivating his genius: everything contributed to my illusion. A King who has gained battles and provinces, a King of the North who wrote verses in our language—a King whose favour I did not seek, and who said he was devoted to me: why *should* he have made so many advances? It is beyond me: I cannot understand it. I have done my best not to believe La Mettrie.

All the same—I am not sure. In re-reading his verses I came across an Epistle to a painter named Pesne: in which he alludes to the "dear Pesne," whose "brush places him among the gods": and this Pesne is a man he never looks at. However, this *dear Pesne* is *a god.* He could well say as much of me: it is not to say very much. Perhaps everything he writes is inspired by his mind,

and his heart is far from it. Perhaps all those letters wherein he overwhelms me with warm and most touching assurances of kindness really mean nothing at all.

I am giving you terrible weapons to use against me. You will justly blame me for having yielded to his blandishments. You will take me for M. Jourdain, who said, "Can I refuse anything to a court gentleman who calls me his dear friend?" Still, I shall always reply, "He is a most amiable monarch."

You can easily fancy what reflections, what regrets, what difficulties, and, since I must own it, what grief the words of La Mettrie have brought upon me. You will say, Come away! But I am in no position to come away. What I have begun, I must finish—and I have two editions on hand and engagements for several months ahead. I am encompassed on all sides. What is to be done? Ignore that La Mettrie ever told me, confide in you alone, forget all about it, wait? You will most certainly be my consolation. I shall never have to say of you, "She deceived me, vowing she loved me." Were you a queen, you would be true.

Tell me your opinion, I beg you, in detail by the first courier despatched to Lord Tyrconnel.

XXXVII

THE PEEL OF AN ORANGE

To Mme. Denis

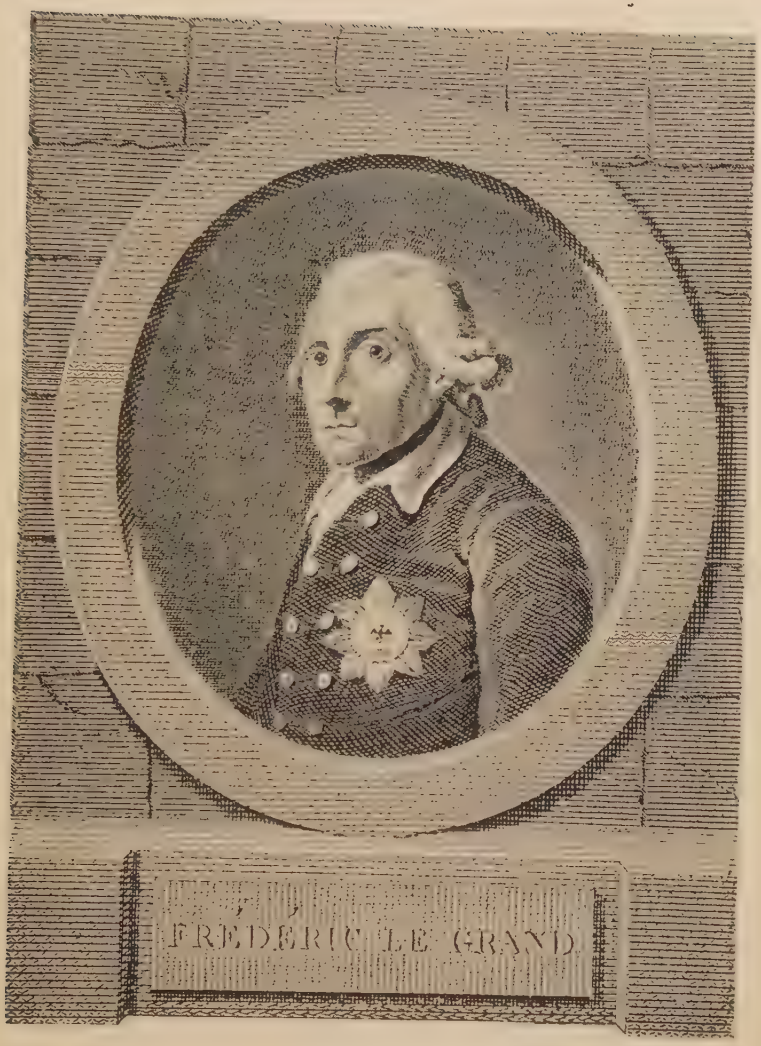
[*"His secretary, Darget"*—reserved, discreet, and trustworthy. In November, 1750, Voltaire had written and told Mme. Denis that when Darget lost his wife King Frederick had written him a touching letter of sympathy: and, the same day, made a shameful epigram upon her. In the affair with Hirsch, the money lender, Darget had pleaded Voltaire's case with angry Frederick: and he was often the medium of letters and messages between the King and his guest.

"I have reconciled him (d'Argens) with Algarotti." The Marquis d'Argens (see Letter XXXIII, "The Little Rift within the Lute").

Algarotti was an agreeable Italian who had been a visitor at Cirey. He had written a book called *Newtonianism for Ladies*, which had been completely eclipsed by Voltaire and Mme. du Châtelet's *Elements of Newton's Philosophy*.]

POTSDAM, October 29, 1751.

My dear plenipotentiary, I am much afraid that my letters will not go via Lord Tyrconnel much longer. He has taken it into his head to burst



FREDERICK THE GREAT

From the portrait by Graf

a large blood-vessel in his chest. It is the broadest and strongest chest imaginable, but the enemy has a footing, and the worst is to be feared.

I am always dreaming of that *peel of an orange:* I try not to believe it, but I am afraid of being like deceived husbands, who are always forcing themselves to think their wives are faithful. The poor wretches feel at the bottom of their hearts something that warns them of their betrayal.

What I am very sure of is that my gracious master has honoured me with a very sharp bite of his teeth in the *Memoirs* he has written of his reign since 1740. There are several epigrams in his verses against the Emperor and the King of Poland. Well and good: a king who writes epigrams against kings will naturally write them on his ministers: but he should spare the nobodies.

You must know that his Majesty, in his after-dinner stories, has insinuated a number of little things about his secretary, Darget, at which the secretary is horrified. He makes him play a very odd rôle in his poem, the *Palladium:* and the poem is in print. It is true, there are very few copies to be had.

What shall I say? That there is no need to be inconsolable if the great love the nobodies though

they laugh at them? But suppose they laugh at them and do not love them—what then? We must laugh in our turn, in our sleeves, and leave them not the less. I must have a little time to remove the money I have invested in the funds here. I shall devote this time to work and patience: and the rest of my life to you.

I am much pleased at the return of brother Isaac d'Argens. He was a little uproarious at first, but now he has put himself in tune with the rest of the orchestra. I have reconciled him with Algarotti. We live like brothers: they come to my room, which I hardly ever leave: from there we go to sup with the King, and sometimes are gay enough. The man who fell from a steeple, and, finding his passage through the air soft, said, *Good! provided it lasts*, is much as I am.

Goodbye, my dear plenipotentiary: how I wish I could fall on to the top of my house in Paris!

XXXVIII

THE TENSION GROWS

To Mme. Denis

["*I never write to you now, my dear, except by a special courier,*" because matters had become so

strained between the King and Voltaire that the King intercepted and read his guest's letters.

"*La Mettrie, when he was at the point of death.*" On November 11, 1751, La Mettrie, having devoured a whole pâté (of eagle, pork, pheasant, and ginger!) at one of Lord Tyrconnel's too excellent suppers, died of a violent indigestion —"the patient," as Voltaire said, "killing the doctor."

"*He never promised any province to Chazot,*" who was a Major, a Frenchman, and a flute player. The fact that he had saved Frederick's life at the battle of Mollwitz did not prevent his experiencing the fickleness of royal favour.

"*This chamberlain's key was simply a gift . . . my cross is a toy.*" Part of Frederick's bribe to Voltaire to come and live in Prussia had been the post of chamberlain and the cross and ribbon of the Prussian Order of Merit.]

POTSDAM, December 24, 1751.

I never write to you now, my dear, except by a special courier; and for a good reason. He will give you six complete proofs of the *Century of Louis XIV* corrected in my handwriting. No permit to print, if you please! Everybody would make game of me. A permit is nothing but a command to flatter, sealed with the yellow seal.

Nothing but a permit and official approval are needed to disparage my work.

I have made my court only to truth, and dedicate the book to her alone. The approbation I want is that of honest men and disinterested readers.

I should like to have asked La Mettrie, when he was at the point of death, more about that *peel of an orange*. That good soul, just about to appear before God, would never have lied. There is a great appearance that he spoke the truth. He was the maddest of men, but the most frank. The King informed himself exactly of the manner of his death—if he dispensed with all religious forms and counsels: and at last was fully convinced that this *gourmand* died as a good philosopher. "I am glad of it," said the King to us, "for the repose of his soul": we all laughed, the King included.

He told me yesterday, in front of d'Argens, that he would give a province to have me with him: *that* does not look like *the peel of an orange*. Apparently, he never promised any province to Chazot. I am perfectly sure he will come back no more. He is very ill-content: and, besides, has pleasanter business on hand. Leave me to arrange mine. Is it possible Paris cries out on me, and takes me for a deserter, gone to serve in Prussia? I repeat once

more, this chamberlain's key, which I never wear, was simply a gift: I have taken no vow: my cross is a toy, and I prefer my writing desk: in a word, I am no naturalised Vandal, and I venture to believe that those who read the *Century of Louis XIV* will see that I am a Frenchman. It is really odd that one cannot be the recipient of a worthless honour from a King of Prussia, who loves literature, without bringing one's compatriots about one's ears! I want to come back much more than those who forced me to go want my return: *you* know I shall not return for them.

From a distance, one cannot see clearly. I receive letters from monks who would like to leave their monastery and live near the King of Prussia, because they have written four French verses. A man I have never seen writes to me, "As you are the friend of the King of Prussia, kindly make my fortune." Another sends me a bundle of Reflections, and informs me he has found the philosopher's stone and will only confide the secret to His Majesty. I returned him his packet, and told him that the King himself is the possessor of the philosopher's stone. Others, who were absolutely indifferent to me when I was with them, tenderly reproach me with having abandoned my friends. My dear child, I have nothing in the world but your letters to cheer and comfort me.

XXXIX

ON HEALTH

To M. Bagieu

[*M. Bagieu* was Surgeon-in-Chief to the body-guard of the King of France and the author of several works on surgery.

When Voltaire turns aside, even from one of the most dramatic phases in his life, to speak of his health, it is always worth while to follow him. Constitutionally feeble and continually ailing as he was, the mind so triumphed over the sickly body that it was never with him on any occasion "the impediment to great enterprises" most men would have allowed it to be.

"*The Suitors*"—*Les Plaideurs*, Racine's satirical comedy against lawyers.]

POTSDAM, April 10, 1752.

Nothing, my dear sir, has ever so deeply touched me as the letter which you have so kindly and spontaneously written to me, the interest you manifest in a condition of which particulars have not been furnished to you, and the help you tender me with so much good will. The hope of finding in Paris hearts as compassionate as yours and men at once thus worthy of their profession and superior

to it quickens my desire to take the journey thither and makes my life of more value to me.

I owe a great deal to Mme. Denis for having claimed your attention on my behalf. Certainly, such thoughtful people are only to be found in France: just as your art attains perfection in France alone. Mine is a small affair. I never set out to do more than amuse people: and some are very far from thanking me. You are busy giving them help in their need. I have always looked on your profession as one of those which did most honour to the age of Louis XIV: and I have spoken of it to that effect in my history of that century: but I have never thought more highly of it than I do now. Mme. de Pimbesche in the *Suitors* learnt to plead as a barrister—by pleading—and, in this sense, I have exhaustively studied medicine. I have read Sydenham, Freind, Boerhaave. I know the art must be largely a matter of conjecture, that few temperaments are alike, and that the first aphorism of Hippocrates, *Experientia fallax, judicium difficile*, is the finest and truest of all.

I have come to the conclusion that each man must be his own doctor: that he must live by rule, now and again assist nature without forcing her: above all, that he must know how to suffer, grow old, and die.

The King of Prussia, who has made peace after

his five victories and is now reforming laws and embellishing his country (having finished writing its history), condescends sometimes to very pretty verse, and has addressed an Ode to me on this grim necessity to which we must all submit. This work and your letter have done more for me than all the physicians on earth. I ought not to complain of my fate. I have lived to be fifty-eight years old, with a very feeble body, and have seen the most robust die in the flower of their age. If you had ever met Lord Tyrconnel and La Mettrie you would be astounded that I should survive them: care has saved me. It is true that I have lost all my teeth in consequence of a malady with which I was born: everyone has within him, from the first moment of his life, the cause of his death. We must live with the foe till he kills us. Demouret's remedy does not suit me: it is only of service in cases of pronounced occasional scurvy, and none at all where the blood is affected and the organs have lost their vigour and suppleness. The waters of Brèges, Padua, or Ischia might do me good for a time: but I am far from sure if it is not better to suffer in peace, by one's own fireside, and diet oneself, than to go so far in search of a cure which is both uncertain and short-lived. My manner of life with the King of Prussia is precisely suited to an invalid—perfect liberty, without the slightest

constraint, a light and cheerful supper. . . . *Deus nobis hæc otia fecit.* He makes me as happy as an invalid can be: and your interest in my well-being adds to the alleviations of my lot. Pray look upon me, sir, as a friend whom you made across four hundred miles of space. I trust this summer to be able to come and assure you personally with what sincere regard I am yours always, etc.

XL

THE QUARREL WITH MAUPERTUIS

To Mme. Denis

[The occasion of the quarrel with Maupertuis (see Letter XXXIII, "The Little Rift within the Lute") is sufficiently explained by Voltaire in this letter. It need only be added that Koenig—a dull man and a brilliant mathematician—had been Mme. du Châtelet's mathematical tutor and a visitor at Cirey.

("*La Beaumelle . . . has prepared some scandalous 'Notes' to my 'Century of Louis XIV'*" (see Letter LI, "On the Advantages of Civilisation and Literature").]

July 24, 1752.

You and your friends are perfectly right to urge my return, but you have not always done so by

special messengers: and what goes through the post is soon known. If this were the only drawback to absence, it would be sufficient to prevent one from ever leaving one's family and friends: but there are so many others! The postal system is all very well for letters of exchange—but not for a communion of hearts: those, when we are parted, we dare open no more.

The greatest of consolations is thus debarred us: I shall only write to you in future, my dear child, through reliable channels: which are few. These are my circumstances: Maupertuis has carefully spread the report that I think the King's writings very bad: he accuses me of conspiring against a very dangerous power—self-love: he gently insinuates that, when the King sent me his verses to correct, I said, "Will he never stop giving me his dirty linen to wash?" He has whispered this extraordinary story in the ears of ten or a dozen people, vowing each of them to secrecy. At last I am beginning to think the King was one of his confidants. I suspect, but cannot prove it. This is not a very pleasant situation: and this is not all.

At the end of last year a young man, named La Beaumelle, arrived here. He is, I think, a Genevan, and was sent back here from Copenhagen, where he was something between a wit and a preacher. He is the author of a book called

My Thoughts, in which he has given his opinion freely on all the powers in Europe. Maupertuis, with his usual good nature and, of course, not the least maliciously, persuades this young man that I have spoken ill of himself and his book to his Majesty, and have thereby prevented his entering the royal service. So La Beaumelle, to repair the harm I am supposed to have done to his career, has prepared some scandalous *Notes* to my *Century of Louis XIV* which he is about to print—I know not where. Those who have seen these fine notes say they contain as many blunders as words.

As to the quarrel between Maupertuis and Koenig, here are the facts:

Koenig has fallen in love with a geometrical problem, as a paladin with a lady. Last year he travelled from the Hague to Berlin expressly to confer with Maupertuis on an algebraic formula and on a law of nature, which would not interest you in the least. He showed him a couple of letters from an old philosopher of the last century, named Leibnitz, who would interest you no better: and made it clear that Leibnitz, in dealing with this same law, had totally disagreed with Maupertuis. Maupertuis, who is much more engaged in court intrigues—or what he takes to be such—than geometrical truths, did not even read Leibnitz's letters.

The Hague professor demanded permission to ventilate his theories in the Leipsic papers: having it, he refuted therein, with the most exquisite politeness, the opinion of Maupertuis, quoting Leibnitz as his authority and printing passages from his works which bore on the dispute.

Now comes the odd part.

Maupertuis, having looked through and misread the Leipsic papers and the quotations from Leibnitz, gets it into his head that Leibnitz was of *his* opinion, and that Koenig had forged the letters to deprive him (Maupertuis) of the honour and glory of having originated—a blunder.

On these extraordinary grounds, he called together the resident academicians, whose salaries he pays: formally denounced Koenig as a forger, and had sentence passed on him, without taking a vote, and in spite of the opposition of the only geometrician who was present.

He did better still: he did not associate himself with the sentence, but wrote a letter to the Academy to ask pardon for the culprit, who, being at the Hague and so not able to be hanged in Berlin, was merely denounced, with all possible moderation, as a geometrical rogue and forger.

This fine judgment is in print. To crown all, our judicious president writes two letters to the Princess of Orange—Koenig is her librarian—to beg her

to insist on the enemy's silence, and so rob him—condemned and branded as he is—of the right to defend his honour.

These details only reached my solitude yesterday.

Every day there is something new under the sun. Never before, surely, was there such a thing as a criminal suit in an academy of sciences! Flight from such a country as this is now proved a necessity.

I am quietly putting my affairs in order. My warmest love to you.

XLI

ON THE SAME SUBJECT

To Mme. Denis

[In the three months which had passed since Voltaire's letter to his niece of July 24th, his quarrel with Maupertuis had made rapid progress. On September 18th Voltaire had published an anonymous pamphlet defending Koenig: and a few days later Koenig wrote a convincing *Appeal* on his own behalf. King Frederick, meaning to stand by Maupertuis, right or wrong, did not even read it, but himself produced that "*brochure against Koenig, against me*" and against everyone who had tried to prove Koenig's innocence to which

this letter alludes, and which was entitled *A Letter to the Public.*

"*I have no sceptre, but I have a pen: and I have used it to turn Plato into ridicule*" in the famous *Diatribe of Dr. Akakia* at the moment still in the author's desk.]

POTSDAM, October 15, 1752.

Here is something unprecedented—inimitable—unique. The King of Prussia, without having read a word of Koenig's reply, without listening to or consulting anybody, has just produced a brochure against Koenig, against me, and against everyone who has tried to prove the innocence of the unjustly condemned professor. He treats all Koenig's friends as fools, envious, dishonest. A singular pamphlet indeed: and a king wrote it!

The German journalists, not suspecting that a monarch who had won battles could be the author of such a work, have spoken of it freely as the effort of a schoolboy, perfectly ignorant of his subject. However, the brochure has been reprinted at Berlin with the Prussian eagle, a crown, and a sceptre on the title-page. The eagle, the sceptre, and the crown are exceedingly surprised to find themselves there. Everybody shrugs their shoulders, casts down their eyes, and is afraid to say anything. Truth is never to be found near a throne: and is

never farther from it than when the king turns author. Coquettes, kings, and poets are accustomed to be flattered. Frederick is a combination of all three. How can truth pierce that triple wall of vanity? Maupertuis has not succeeded in being Plato, but he wants his royal master to be Dionysius of Syracuse.

What is most extraordinary in this cruel and ridiculous affair is that the King has no liking for this Maupertuis, for whose benefit he is employing his sceptre and his pen. Plato nearly died of mortification at not being invited to certain little suppers, which I attended, and where the King told us a hundred times that this Plato's mad vanity rendered him intolerable.

He has written prose for him now, as he once wrote verses for d'Arnaud—for the pleasure of doing it: and for another motive less worthy of a philosopher—to annoy me. A true author, you see!

But all this is but the most insignificant part of what has happened. I too am unfortunately an author, and in the opposite camp. I have no sceptre, but I have a pen: and I have used it—I really do not know how—to turn Plato—with his stipendiaries, his predictions, his dissections, and his insolent quarrel with Koenig—into ridicule. My raillery is quite innocent, but I did not know

when I wrote it I was laughing at the pastimes of the King. The affair is unlucky. I have to deal with conceit and with despotic power—two very dangerous things. I also have reason to believe that my affair with the Duke of Würtemberg has given offence. It was discovered: and I have been made to feel it was discovered. . . .

I am at the moment very wretched and very ill: and, to crown all, I have to sup with the King. Truly, a feast of Damocles! I need to be as philosophical as was the real Plato in the house of Dionysius.

XLII

THE STORM BURSTS

From Frederick the Great

[The originals of this letter and of the next one, from Voltaire, are preserved in the Bibliothèque Nationale. Voltaire's is written at the foot of his royal host's. Frederick's is evidently dashed on to paper in a rage, and the French is very ill spelt.

"*After what you have done,*" that is, in the affair of the *Diatribe of Dr. Akakia* against Maupertuis. For this *Diatribe*, in which Voltaire had attacked Maupertuis in one of the most famous satires in

the world, which, in its mocking wit and the seeming-innocent gaiety of its remorseless logic, is one of the most Voltairean of all Voltaire's works, he had obtained the royal permit to publish by a trick. He read to Frederick a *Defence of Lord Bolingbroke*—that is, a defence of Bolingbroke's *Letters on History*—which he, Voltaire, had just written, gained the King's sanction for its publication, and then slipped in front of it, *Akakia*. Thus, printed by his own printers, in his own private printing office at Potsdam, there appeared, to the immeasurable but very natural rage of King Frederick, this merciless onslaught on his friend and president. All things considered, the royal letter is not immoderate. Though the printer owned everything, Voltaire continued to deny everything. His royal host threatened the guest with a heavy fine, and for a week stationed a sentinel, in true Prussian fashion, outside his door.]

1752.

Your effrontery amazes me after what you have done, which is as clear as daylight. You persist in it instead of owning yourself guilty: do not imagine that you can make people believe that black is white; when one takes no notice, it is because one prefers to see nothing; but if you carry this business any further, I shall have everything

printed, and the world will see that if your works deserve statues, your conduct deserves chains.

The publisher has been questioned, and has confessed all.

Voltaire to Frederick the Great

Good God, sire, what a position I am in! I swear to you on my life—which I will most willingly relinquish—that the whole thing is a frightful calumny. I implore you to cross-examine all my *entourage*. Surely, you would not condemn me without hearing me. I demand justice and death.

XLIII

THE DICTIONARY OF KINGS

To Mme. Denis

[In November of this year, 1752, Frederick had been able to assure Maupertuis that *Akakia* had been burnt in the royal presence. But there were other editions, and in December, Berlin, which hated Maupertuis, was reading them and enjoying itself as it had never enjoyed itself before. Voltaire was living in Berlin at a friend's house—sombrely considering how "to save the peel."

"*It is not possible to say 'I am going to Plombières'*

in December"—Plombières being a summer resort and no one taking its water-cure in winter.]

BERLIN, December 18, 1752.

I enclose, my dear, the two contracts from the Duke of Würtemberg: they secure you a little fortune for life. I also enclose my will. Not that your prophecy that the King of Prussia *would worry me to death* is going to be fulfilled. I have no mind to come to such a foolish end: nature afflicts me much more than he can, and it is only prudent that I should always have my valise packed and my foot in the stirrup, ready to start for that world where, happen what may, kings will be of small account.

As I do not possess here below a hundred and fifty thousand soldiers, I cannot pretend to make war. My only plan is to desert honourably, to take care of my health, to see you again, and forget this three years' nightmare. I am very well aware that *the orange has been squeezed:* now we must consider how to save the peel. I am compiling, for my instruction, a little Dictionary for the Use of Kings.

My friend means *my slave.*

My dear friend means *you are absolutely nothing to me.*

By *I will make you happy* understand *I will bear you as long as I have need of you.*

Sup with me to-night means *I shall make game of you this evening.*

The dictionary might be long: quite an article for the Encyclopædia.

Seriously, all this weighs on my heart. Can what I have seen be true? To take pleasure in making bad blood between those who live together with him! To say to a man's face the kindest things—and then to write brochures upon him—and what brochures! To drag a man away from his own country by the most sacred promises, and then to ill-treat him with the blackest malice! What contradictions! And this is he who wrote so philosophically: whom I believed to be a philosopher! And whom I called the *Solomon of the North!*

You remember that fine letter which never succeeded in reassuring you? *You are a philosopher*, said he, *and so am I.* On my soul, sir, neither the one nor the other of us!

My dear child, I shall certainly never believe myself to be a philosopher until I am with you and my household gods. The difficulty is to get away from here. You will remember what I told you in my letter of November 1st. I can only ask leave on the plea of my health. It is not possible to say "I am going to Plombières" in December.

There is a man named Pérrard here: a sort of minister of the Gospel and born, like myself, in France: he asked permission to go to Paris on business: the King answered that he knew his affairs better than he did himself, and that there was no need at all for him to go to Paris.

My dear child, when I think over the details of all that is going on here, I come to the conclusion that it cannot be true, that it is impossible, that I must be mistaken—that such a thing must have happened at Syracuse three thousand years ago. What *is* true is that I sincerely love you and that you are my only consolation.

XLIV

FAREWELL

To Frederick the Great

[On the Christmas Eve of 1752 Voltaire, looking out of the window of his Berlin lodgings, beheld a crowd watching a bonfire. "I'll bet that's my Doctor," said he; and, in fact, *Akakia* it was. That conflagration (which advertised the *Diatribe* to the four corners of Europe) decided its author to "desert honourably" as soon as might be. On New Year's Day, 1753, at three o'clock in the afternoon he returned to King Frederick the cross and

ribbon of the Prussian order bestowed on him and the chamberlain's key, and accompanied them by the following letter.]

January 1, 1753.

Sire, urged by the prayers and tears of my family, I am compelled to lay my fate at your feet, together with the favours and marks of distinction with which you have honoured me. Only my grief can be as great as the value of all I am renouncing. Your Majesty may rest assured that I shall remember nothing but the benefits conferred on me. Attached to you for sixteen years by many kindnesses: summoned to your side in my old age: my fears of that transplantation, which has cost me much, quieted by the most solemn promises: and having had the honour of living for two and a half years at your side; it is impossible you should deny to me the possession of feelings which have outweighed in my heart the claims of my country, my king (who is at once my sovereign and benefactor), my family, my friends, and my occupations.

I have lost them all. Nothing remains to me but the remembrance of the pleasant days I have spent in your retreat at Potsdam. After that, all other solitudes will indeed seem melancholy to me. It is, moreover, hard to leave at this season of the

year, especially when one is, as I am, the victim of many diseases: and it is harder still to leave you. Believe me, that is the only pain I am capable of feeling at this moment. The French envoy, who has come in as I write this, will bear witness to my sorrow, and will answer for me to your Majesty of the sentiments I shall always retain. I made you my idol: an honest man does not change his religion, and sixteen years of a limitless devotion cannot be destroyed by a single unfortunate moment.

I flatter myself that out of so much kindness you will keep at least some feeling of humanity towards me: that is my sole consolation, if consolation I may have.

XLV

DISMISSED

King Frederick the Great to Voltaire

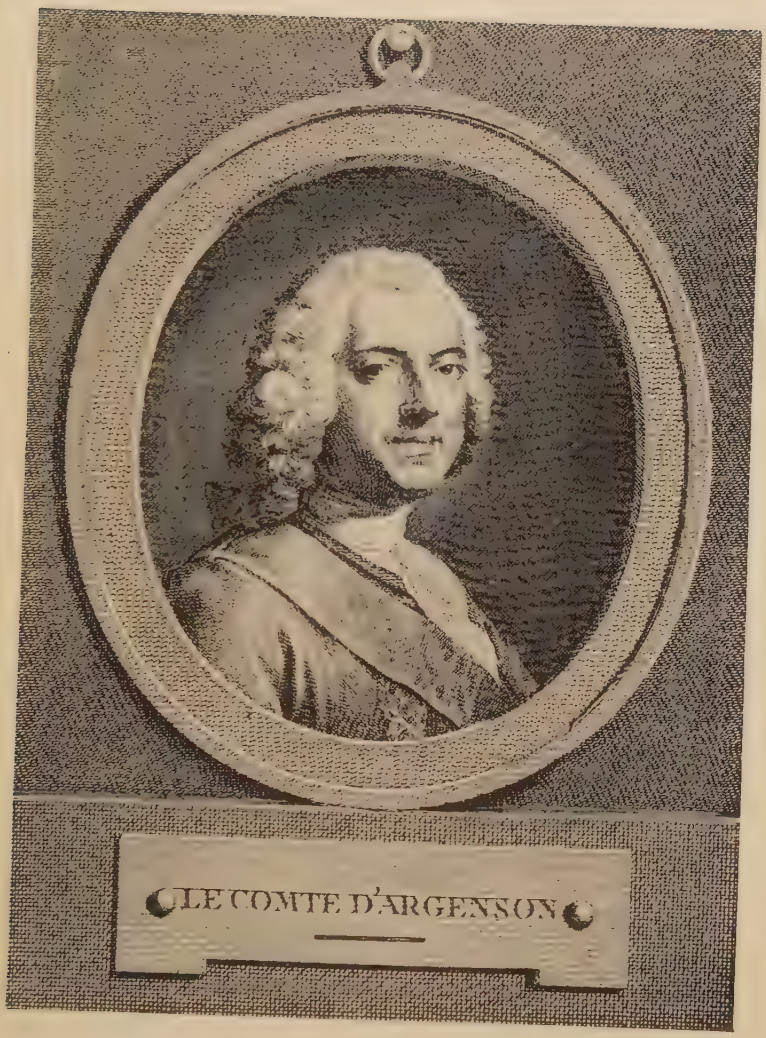
[To a moral obtuseness, characteristically German, must be attributed the fact that, after Voltaire's "Farewell" letter of January 1, 1753, the royal host did not disdain to use all his royal powers to chain his unwilling guest to his side. On March 1st Voltaire begged formally for leave of absence to

go to French Plombières and drink the waters. After a fortnight's silence, Frederick replied that the waters of Moravia were quite as good: and then, on March 16th, flung on to paper the following famous dismissal, which, with some slight differences of expression, was printed by his orders in the gazettes of Holland and Utrecht, and is still preserved in the archives of Berlin.

"*The volume of poetry which I have confided to him*"—the free-thinking, and often indecorous, poetical effusions of King Frederick, which Voltaire had been correcting for him, and which were shortly to become all too notorious for both writer and corrector.]

March 16, 1753.

He can leave my service when he feels inclined: he need not trouble to invent the excuse of the waters of Plombières, but he must have the goodness, before he goes, to return to me the contract of his engagement, the key, the cross, and the volume of poetry which I have confided to him: I could wish that he and Koenig had only attacked my works, which I sacrifice willingly to those who desire to belittle other people's reputations: I have none of the vanity and folly of authors, and the cabals of men of letters seem to me the depth of baseness.



THE COMTE D'ARGENSON, MINISTER OF WAR TO LOUIS XV.

From the portrait by Nattier

XLVI

THE ESCAPE FROM PRUSSIA

Petition to the King of France, through the Comte d'Argenson, Minister of War

[*The Comte d'Argenson* and his brother, the Marquis, had been at school with Voltaire, and remained thereafter his very influential friends. It was the Comte d'Argenson who had obtained for him the honour of writing the authorised account of the royal campaigns, which eventually became the *History of Louis XV*. This petition "*to be allowed to die in his own country*" was not, however, accorded to Voltaire. Only a month later d'Argenson, who is famous for having reorganised the French army, was writing in his diary, "Permission to re-enter France is refused to M. de Voltaire—to please the King of Prussia." By March 26, 1753, Voltaire had, however, effected his escape from Frederick and Potsdam. On April 11th, Frederick had practically commanded Freytag, his resident at Frankfort, to harry the parting guest when he passed through that city: and Freytag—the typical German official, literally choked with red tape—exceeded his orders in the manner described in the following letter. Despite it, it was not until the early days of July that Voltaire and

his niece succeeded in getting away from Frankfort.]

June 28, 1753.

Sire, M. de Voltaire takes the liberty of informing your Majesty that, having worked for two and a half years to perfect the King of Prussia's knowledge of French literature, M. de Voltaire respectfully returned to him his key, his ribbon, and his pensions: that he has annulled, in writing, the agreement his Prussian Majesty made with him, promising to return it to him as soon as he can get at his papers, to make no further use of it, and desiring no other reward than to be allowed to die in his own country. He went to Plombières with your Majesty's permission. Mme. Denis preceded him to Frankfort, with a passport.

A person called Dorn, the clerk of M. Freytag, who calls himself the King of Prussia's envoy at Frankfort, on June 20th arrested Mme. Denis, the widow of an officer in his Majesty's service, furnished with a passport: he then dragged her through the streets under an escort of soldiers, and without instructions or formalities or the slightest pretext of any kind, put her in prison, and had the insolence to stay all night in her room. For thirty-six hours she was at the point of death, and now—June 28th—has not entirely recovered.

During this time, a merchant named Schmith,

professing to be a representative of the King of Prussia, meted like treatment to M. de Voltaire and his secretary, and without any sort of *procès-verbal* took possession of all their effects. The next day, Freytag and Schmith informed their prisoners that they would have to pay a hundred and twenty-eight écus each day they were detained.

The pretext for this violence and robbery is an order which MM. Freytag and Schmith had received from Berlin in May, bidding them demand from M. de Voltaire the printed book of French poetry written by his Prussian Majesty, which his Prussian Majesty had given to M. de Voltaire.

This book being at Hamburg, M. de Voltaire had given his word of honour on June 1st not to leave Frankfort until the book was returned: and M. Freytag, in the name of his master the King, affixed his signature to two letters, identical with each other, and running as follows:

"Sir, if the packet which you declare to be at Hamburg or Leipsic, and which contains the poetical work (*œuvre de poëshie*) of the King, arrives here and the book is given up to me, you can go when you like."

M. de Voltaire then gave him, as pledges, two packets of papers—one literary, and the other dealing with family affairs: and M. Freytag signed the following note:

"I promise to return to M. de Voltaire these two packets, sealed with his seal, as soon as the packet containing the poetical work which the King demands is to hand."

The poetical work having arrived on June 18th, addressed to M. Freytag, with the box from Hamburg, M. de Voltaire obviously had the right to leave on June 20th. It was on June 20th that he, his niece, his secretary, and his servants were treated as prisoners in the manner herein set forth.

XLVII

ON INOCULATION

To the Comte d'Argental

[*The Comte d'Argental* (see Letter XXI, "On Treachery"). This letter was written when Voltaire was nearing Colmar, where he spent nearly a year in hard literary work before settling in Switzerland.

"*Mme. de Montaigu,*" Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, the famous letter-writer, who introduced inoculation into England from the East in 1717 (see Letter LX, "On Lady Mary Wortley Montagu").

"*The late Queen.*" This was Queen Caroline of England, wife of George II.

"*That Fontenelle would have outlived Mme. d'Aumont.*" Fontenelle—in Voltaire's own words "poet, philosopher, scholar"—the nephew of the great Corneille, was known as the author of the *Plurality of Worlds* and for his extraordinary length of days. "Fontenelle," said Voltaire, "was a Norman, he cheated even nature." He died in 1757, being a hundred years old.]

NEAR COLMAR, October 3, 1753.

My dear angel, if the Maréchale de Duras, who looks so very strong-minded, had done as did Mme. de Montaigu and the late Queen—if she had been courageous enough to give the smallpox to her children, you would not be mourning the Duchesse d'Aumont to-day. Thirty years ago I declared that a tenth part of the nation might thus be saved. A few people, grieved by the loss of valuable lives from smallpox in the flower of their youth, say, "Really, inoculation ought to be tried": and by the end of a fortnight they have forgotten alike those who have fallen victims to the scourge and those who yet will fall.

Last year, the Bishop of Worcester preached in London before the Houses of Parliament in favour of inoculation, and proved that it saved, in London alone, two thousand lives a year. That was a

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sermon which did much more good than the stuff our preachers talk. . . .

I dare not ask you to give my respects and sympathy to the Duc d'Aumont. Who would have thought that Fontenelle would have outlived Mme. d'Aumont! But a hundred years and thirty are the same before Death's scythe. Our life is a point in space—a dream. *My* life's dream has been a perpetual nightmare: it would be very soothing if, at the end of it, I could see you: that would be a very pleasant light on which to open my eyes. . . .

XLVIII

ON A FRIEND'S BLINDNESS

To Mme. du Deffand

[The Marquise du Deffand, wit, letter-writer, and *salonière*, was one of "those women of brilliant talents who" under the old régime "violated all the common duties of life and gave very pleasant little suppers." She had visited Voltaire in the Bastille in 1726, when he was twenty-seven: he visited her when he came to Paris in 1778, when he was eighty-three. After she became blind in 1753 he was her constant and sympathetic correspondent. Only Horace Walpole excelled his devotion as her friend.

"*Mme. de Staal,*" who had been Mdlle. de Launay, and was still companion to the Duchesse du Maine, with whom Voltaire had first stayed at Sceaux as a brilliant youth of one and twenty (see Letter XLIX, "On the Memoirs of Lord Bolingbroke"). Mme. de Staal recounted, with a satiric pen, the gossip of the Maine court to Mme. du Deffand in Paris: and has left behind her brilliant and bitter Memoirs.

"*I am in receipt of annuities from two potentates.*" These were the Duke of Würtemberg and the Elector Palatine.

"*The conduct of Dionysius of Syracuse*"—Frederick the Great.

"*The Plato of Saint-Malo*"—Maupertuis, who was a native of that place . . . "*his good doctor Akakia*"—of course Voltaire himself as the author of the *Diatribe* (see Letters XXXIII, "The Little Rift within the Lute"; XL and XLI, "The Quarrel with Maupertuis"; XLII, "The Storm Bursts," and XLIV, "Farewell").]

COLMAR, March 3, 1754.

Your letter, madam, touched me more deeply than you can imagine, and I assure you my eyes were wet when I read what had happened to yours. I had gathered, from M. de Formont's letter, that you were, so to speak, in the dusk but not in com-

plete darkness. I thought of you as somewhat in Mme. de Staal's condition, with the inestimable advantage, which she lacks, of freedom, of having friends about you who can think and speak as they please, and of living in your own house instead of being subjected, in a princess's, to restrictions which savour of hypocrisy.

Therefore, dear madam, I only regretted that your eyes had lost their beauty: and I was sure you were enough of a philosopher to console yourself for that: but, if you have lost your sight, I pity you very deeply. I do not suggest to you as an example M. de S. who, blind at twenty, is always lively—if not too lively. I agree with you that life is not worth much: we only endure it from an almost invincible instinct which nature has planted in us: to this instinct she has added the bottom of Pandora's box—hope.

Only when hope is absolutely lacking, or when an unbearable depression settles down upon us, do we triumph over the natural impulse to hug the chains that bind us to life: and gather courage to leave an ill-built house which we can never hope to repair. Two people in the country where I now am have elected to do this.

One of these two philosophers is a girl of eighteen, whose brain had been turned by the Jesuits, and who, to rid herself of them, set out for the next

world. That is a thing *I* shall not do, or at any rate not yet, for I am in receipt of annuities from two potentates, and I should be inconsolable if by my death I enriched two crowned heads.

If you, madam, have a pension from the King, be exceedingly careful of yourself, eat little, go to bed early, and live to be a hundred.

The conduct of Dionysius of Syracuse is as incomprehensible as himself: he is a strange specimen. I am glad I have been at Syracuse, for I assure you there is no place like it on the face of the earth.

The Plato of Saint-Malo, with his flat nose and his ridiculous visions, is no less extraordinary: he must have been born with real wit and talent, but excessive vanity has made him both vicious and absurd. Is it not a fearful thing that he should have persecuted his good doctor Akakia, who tried to cure him of his madness—with emollients?

Who in the world, madam, can have told you that I am going to be married? I am a nice person to be married! For six months I have hardly been outside my room, and I am in pain ten hours out of every twelve. If any doctor knows a nice-looking girl, who is quick and clever at medical appliances, at fattening chickens and reading aloud, I confess I might be tempted: but my warmest and sincerest desire is to spend the evening of the

stormy day called life with you. I have seen you in your brilliant morning, and it would be a great comfort to me if I could help to comfort you, and to converse with you freely in the brief moments that remain to us. . . .

XLIX

ON THE "MEMOIRS OF LORD BOLINGBROKE"

To Mme. du Deffand

[*Lord Bolingbroke*—Henry St. John, Viscount Bolingbroke, the famous English statesman, with whom Voltaire, as a young man, had stayed both in London and at Bolingbroke's French home, La Source, near Orléans. It was to Bolingbroke Voltaire had read aloud the *Henriade* before its publication: and to Bolingbroke he had dedicated his play *Brutus:* and his *Defence* of Lord Bolingbroke's *Letters on History* had been the means of his obtaining King Frederick's permit to print *The Diatribe of Dr. Akakia* (see Letter XLII, "The Storm Bursts").

"*The Memoirs of Lord Bolingbroke . . . the abbreviated and confused little book he has left us.*" *Les Mémoires Secrètes de Lord Bolingbroke* is the

title of the French translation, published in 1753, of his *Letters to Windham.*

"*A frightful portrait of Lord Oxford*"—Robert Harley, Earl of Oxford, Chancellor of the Exchequer to Queen Anne, was first the friend and then the bitter enemy of Bolingbroke, who succeeded him as Prime Minister.

"*These cursed 'Annals of the Empire.'*" A popular history of Germany from the time of Charlemagne, and, as Voltaire himself thought, one of the least successful of his works. "*The Princess of Saxony,*" at whose command he wrote them, was the charming Duchess of Saxe-Gotha, with whom he had corresponded from Cirey, and whom he had now recently visited at "her court" at Gotha.

"*The Duchesse du Maine . . . Sceaux*" (see Letter XLVIII, "On a Friend's Blindness"). The Duchesse du Maine, "that living fragment of the Grand Epoch," a brilliant and imperious old woman (her only counterpart in English eighteenth-century society is Lady Holland), not only entertained Voltaire at her semi-royal court of Sceaux, but had sheltered him in 1747 from the disfavour of Louis XV. At Sceaux, he had written (and read secretly to his Duchess as she sat up in bed at two o'clock in the morning) those little models of the short story, *Zadig*, *Scarmentado*, *Micromégas*, and *Babouc*.

"*President Hénault*" was President of the Chambre des Enquêtes; had been a friend of Voltaire for five and thirty years, and an *habitué* of the salon of Mme. du Deffand, to whom he appeared deeply attached until he deserted her society for that of Mdlle. de Lespinasse—first her *dame de compagnie*, and then her rival.]

COLMAR, April 23, 1754.

I feel very guilty, dear madam, at not having answered your last letter. I do not make my bad health an excuse: for, although I cannot write with my own hand, I could at least have dictated the most melancholy things, which, to those who, like you, know all the misfortunes of life and are no longer deceived by its illusions, are not unacceptable.

I remember that I advised you to go on living solely to enrage those who are paying your annuities. As far as I am concerned, it is the only pleasure I have left. When I feel an attack of indigestion coming on, I picture two or three princes as gainers by my death, take courage out of spite, and conspire against them with rhubarb and temperance.

Still, notwithstanding my desire to do them a bad turn by living on, I have been very ill. Add to that, these cursed *Annals of the Empire*, which put

an extinguisher on all imagination and take up all my time, and you have the reasons for my idleness. I have been working at these stupid things for a Princess of Saxony—who deserves something livelier from me. She is a most agreeable royalty, and has things much better done than the Duchesse du Maine, while her court allows one much more liberty than did Sceaux, but, unfortunately, the climate is horrible: and just now I care for nothing but the sun. You cannot see it, madam, in the present state of your eyes: but it is good at least to *feel* warm. The horrible winter we have had makes one wretched: and the news that reaches us does not improve matters.

I wish I could send you some trifles to amuse you, but the works I am now engaged on are far from amusing.

In London I was an Englishman: and in Germany a German: with you my chameleon coat would soon take on brighter colours—your lively imagination would fire my drooping wits.

I have been reading the *Memoirs of Lord Bolingbroke*. It seems to me that he talks better than he writes. I declare I find his style as difficult of comprehension as his conduct. He draws a frightful portrait of Lord Oxford—without adducing any proofs. This is the Oxford whom Pope calls:

"A Soul supreme, in each hard instance try'd,
Above all Pain, all Passion, and all Pride,
The rage of Pow'r, the blast of public breath,
The Lust of Lucre, and the dread of Death."

Bolingbroke would have employed his leisure better if he had written good memoirs on the War of the Succession, the Peace of Utrecht, the character of Queen Anne, the Duke and Duchess of Marlborough, Louis XIV, the Duke of Orléans, and the French and English ministers. If he had been skilful enough to blend his Apologia with these great subjects, he would have made it immortal: instead of which it is completely lost in the abbreviated and confused little book he has left us.

I cannot understand how a man, who appeared to take such wide views, should condescend to such trivialities. His translator is quite mistaken in saying I try to proscribe the study of facts. The reproach I bring against Lord Bolingbroke is that he has given us too few, and that the few he records he smothers in trivialities. However, I think his Memoirs will have given you a certain amount of pleasure, and as you read them you must very often have found yourself on familiar ground.

Good-bye, madam; let us try to bear our earthly afflictions patiently. Courage is of *some* use: it flatters self-love, it lessens misfortune: but it

does not give one back one's sight. I always most sincerely pity you: your fate touches me deeply.

A thousand compliments to M. de Formont: and if you see President Hénault, the same to him. My warmest respects.

L

ON POPE AND VIRGIL

To Mme. du Deffand

[*"The Annals, short though they are."* Voltaire's *Annals of the Empire* (see Letter XLIX, "On the 'Memoirs of Lord Bolingbroke' ").

"I would much rather you had the 'Pucelle'" (see Letter XV, "On the 'Pucelle' and the 'Century of Louis XIV' "). The *Pucelle* continued to give Voltaire many anxieties. He had rashly lent some cantos to Prince Henry of Prussia—which the Prince's secretary had copied: and Collini, Voltaire's secretary, had been obliged to hide the dangerous MS. in his breeches to avoid its discovery by Freytag at Frankfort. Now—1754—Voltaire was fearing the whole would slip into print.

"Guignon—who is the king of the violin." There was at the French Court a post bearing the title of

"King of the Violins," occupied by Guignon till 1773: when office and title were suppressed.

"*M. d'Alembert . . . can be sure that if I regard him as the first of our philosophers with wit (d'esprit) it is not out of gratitude*" (see Letter LV, "On the Great Encyclopædia"). D'Alembert had asked Voltaire to contribute the article on "Esprit" to the great Encyclopædia.]

COLMAR, May 19, 1754.

Do you know Latin, madam? No; that is why you ask me if I prefer Pope to Virgil. All modern languages are dry, poor, and unmusical in comparison with those of our first masters, the Greeks and Romans. We are but the fiddles of a village band. Besides, how can I compare Epistles to an Epic poem, to the loves of Dido, the burning of Troy, to Æneas' descent into Hades?

I think Pope's *Essay on Man* the finest of didactic and philosophic poems: but nothing is comparable to Virgil. You know him through translations: but it is impossible to translate the poets. Can you translate music? I regret, madam, that you, with your enlightened taste and feeling, cannot read Virgil. I pity you even more if you are reading the *Annals*, short though they are. Germany, even reduced to a miniature, is not likely to please a French imagination such as yours.

As you like epic poems, I would much rather you had the *Pucelle*. It is a little longer than the *Henriade* and the subject is livelier. Imagination has more play—in serious books in France it is generally much too circumscribed. My regard for historical truth and religious prejudice clipped my wings in the *Henriade:* they have grown again in the *Pucelle*. *Her* annals are much more amusing than those of the Empire.

If M. de Formont is still with you, pray remember me to him: if he has left, remember me to him when you write. I am going to Plombières, not in hopes of recovering my health—those I have quite given up—but because my friends are going there too. I have been six months at Colmar without moving out of my room: and I believe I shall do just the same at Paris unless you are there.

I perceive that, in the long run, there is really nothing worth the trouble of leaving the house for. Illness has great advantages: it spares one society. It is different for you, madam: society is as necessary to you as a violin to Guignon—who is the *King* of the violin.

M. d'Alembert is worthy of you: and much too good for his generation. He has repeatedly honoured me far above my deserts, and he can be sure, if I regard him as the first of our philosophers with wit, it is not out of gratitude.

I do not often write to you, madam, although the next best thing to having a letter from you is answering one: but I am overwhelmed with hard work, and divide my time between it and the colic. I have no leisure—I am always either ill or working. That makes life a full one, though not a perfectly happy one: but where is happiness to be found? *I* have not the slightest idea: it is a very nice problem to solve.

LI

ON THE ADVANTAGES OF CIVILISATION AND LITERATURE

To J. J. Rousseau

[In 1745, when Voltaire was basking in the brief sunshine of the favour of Louis XV, he had first had dealings with Jean Jacques Rousseau, native of Geneva, then music-copier and writer of Court *divertissements*, and, to be, the impassioned sentimentalist of golden eloquence—the author of the *Social Contract*, *The New Eloïsa*, and of the famous, infamous *Confessions*.

In 1755 he had written a Prize Essay for the Academy of Dijon called, by himself, *The Discourse on the Origin of Inequality among Men* and

by his friends, *The Essay against Civilisation*, which elaborated his pet theory of the advantages of savage over civilised life, and which he sent to Voltaire. Voltaire replied in the following letter; which Rousseau presently acknowledged in terms of warm friendship. When, two months later, Voltaire's soul was appalled by the fearful earthquake of Lisbon, Jean Jacques considered his theories proved, arguing that houses could not have fallen if there had been no houses to fall, and that if men lived like beasts in the open, earthquakes would be robbed of nearly all their terrors: to which absurdity—as to Pope's wiser optimism in *The Essay on Man*—Voltaire replied by the brilliant and withering mockery of *Candide*.

"*Les Délices*." Les Délices, which still stands, is a house near Geneva, with a fine view of the Jura and the Alps. Voltaire chose it as being under the laws of the Genevan Republic and yet only half an hour's ride into France: and called it Les Délices "because," he said, "nothing is so delightful as to be free and independent." He had been settled there for five months when this letter was written: and lived there for about three years, until he acquired Ferney.

"*The greatest doctor in Europe*"—Dr. Theodore Tronchin, who was Voltaire's doctor from 1754 until Voltaire's death, was a member of a celebrated

Genevan family and one of the earliest discoverers of the value of fresh air, soberness, temperance, and chastity. He had the generosity to accept the discovery of inoculation against smallpox at the hands of a woman, and the courage to practise it in the teeth of popular prejudice at his fashionable "cure" at Geneva, where he preached many other unfashionable doctrines—especially to women. He was a convinced and devout Christian, and no more afraid to tell unpalatable truths to Voltaire than to obscurer patients. Voltaire never wrote or spoke of him but in terms of affection, respect, and admiration.

"*Close to your country where you yourself should be*"—that is, to Geneva: Rousseau was in Paris at the time.

"*An ex-Jesuit priest whom I saved from utter disgrace*"—the Abbé Desfontaines (see Letter XXI, "On Treachery").

"*Of a man yet more contemptible printing my 'Century of Louis XIV' with notes.*" This was La Beaumelle,—the protégé of Voltaire's Prussian enemy, Maupertuis—who had brought out a pirated edition of Voltaire's *Century of Louis XIV* which actually ran parallel with the author's own authorised edition. La Beaumelle's *Notes* contained personal insults to Voltaire and to the Royal Family of France (see Letter XL, "The Quarrel with Maupertuis").

"*Of a 'Universal History,' supposed to be by me.*" This was a pirated edition of one of Voltaire's greatest and most free-spoken works, *The Essay on the Mind and Manners of Nations.* It was printed by a publisher at the Hague—just at the wrong moment; that is, just as Voltaire was leaving Prussia: its daring made his return to France most dangerous, and so helped to decide his residence in Switzerland.

"*A gay trifle I wrote thirty years ago (on the same subject which Chapelain was stupid enough to treat seriously)*"—*The Pucelle*—the history of Joan of Arc. Chapelain was a dull, industrious seventeenth-century writer, who had written Joan's story at immense length. His work was a general subject of ridicule and had been satirised by Boileau.]

LES DÉLICES, August 30, 1755.

I have received, sir, your new book against the human species, and I thank you for it. You will please people by your manner of telling them the truth about themselves, but you will not alter them. The horrors of that human society—from which in our feebleness and ignorance we expect so many consolations—have never been painted in more striking colours: no one has ever been so witty as you are in trying to turn us into brutes: to

read your book makes one long to go on all fours. Since, however, it is now some sixty years since I gave up the practice, I feel that it is unfortunately impossible for me to resume it: I leave this natural habit to those more fit for it than are you and I. Nor can I set sail to discover the aborigines of Canada, in the first place because my ill-health ties me to the side of the greatest doctor in Europe, and I should not find the same professional assistance among the Missouris: and secondly because war is going on in that country, and the example of the civilised nations has made the barbarians almost as wicked as we are ourselves. I must confine myself to being a peaceful savage in the retreat I have chosen—close to your country, where you yourself should be.

I agree with you that science and literature have sometimes done a great deal of harm. Tasso's enemies made his life a long series of misfortunes: Galileo's enemies kept him languishing in prison, at seventy years of age, for the crime of understanding the revolution of the earth: and, what is still more shameful, obliged him to forswear his discovery. Since your friends began the Encyclopædia, their rivals attack them as deists, atheists —even Jansenists.

If I might venture to include myself among those whose works have brought them persecution as

their sole recompense, I could tell you of men set on ruining me from the day I produced my tragedy *Œdipe:* of a perfect library of absurd calumnies which have been written against me: of an ex-Jesuit priest whom I saved from utter disgrace rewarding me by defamatory libels: of a man yet more contemptible printing my *Century of Louis XIV* with *Notes* in which crass ignorance gave birth to the most abominable falsehoods: of yet another, who sold to a publisher some chapters of a *Universal History* supposed to be by me: of the publisher avaricious enough to print this shapeless mass of blunders, wrong dates, mutilated facts and names: and, finally, of men sufficiently base and craven to assign the production of this farago to me. I could show you all society poisoned by this class of person—a class unknown to the ancients—who, not being able to find any honest occupation—be it manual labour or service—and unluckily knowing how to read and write, become the brokers of literature, live on our works, steal our manuscripts, falsify them, and sell them. I could tell of some loose sheets of a gay trifle which I wrote thirty years ago (on the same subject that Chapelain was stupid enough to treat seriously) which are in circulation now through the breach of faith and the cupidity of those who added their own grossness to my *badinage* and filled in the gaps

with a dullness only equalled by their malice; and who, finally, after twenty years, are selling everywhere a manuscript which, in very truth, is theirs and worthy of them only.

I may add, last of all, that someone has stolen part of the material I amassed in the public archives to use in my History of the War of 1741 when I was historiographer of France; that he sold that result of my labours to a bookseller in Paris; and is as set on getting hold of my property as if I were dead and he could turn it into money by putting it up to auction. I could show you ingratitude, imposture, and rapine pursuing me for forty years to the foot of the Alps and the brink of the grave. But what conclusion ought I to draw from all these misfortunes? This only: that I have no right to complain: Pope, Descartes, Bayle, Camoens—a hundred others—have been subjected to the same, or greater, injustice: and my destiny is that of nearly everyone who has loved letters too well.

Confess, sir, that all these things are, after all, but little personal pin-pricks, which society scarcely notices. What matter to humankind that a few drones steal the honey of a few bees? Literary men make a great fuss of their petty quarrels: the rest of the world ignores them, or laughs at them.

They are, perhaps, the least serious of all the ills attendant on human life. The thorns insepar-

able from literature and a modest degree of fame are flowers in comparison with the other evils which from all time have flooded the world. Neither Cicero, Varron, Lucretius, Virgil, or Horace had any part in the proscriptions of Marius, Scylla, that profligate Antony, or that fool Lepidus; while as for that cowardly tyrant, Octavius Cæsar —servilely entitled Augustus—he only became an assassin when he was deprived of the society of men of letters.

Confess that Italy owed none of her troubles to Petrarch or to Boccaccio: that Marot's jests were not responsible for the massacre of St. Bartholomew: or the tragedy of the *Cid* for the wars of the Fronde. Great crimes are always committed by great ignoramuses. What makes, and will always make, this world a vale of tears is the insatiable greediness and the indomitable pride of men, from Thomas Koulikan, who did not know how to read, to a custom-house officer who can just count. Letters support, refine, and comfort the soul: they are serving you, sir, at the very moment you decry them: you are like Achilles declaiming against fame, and Father Malebranche using his brilliant imagination to belittle imagination.

If anyone has a right to complain of letters, I am that person, for in all times and in all places they have led to my being persecuted: still, we must

needs love them in spite of the way they are abused —as we cling to society, though the wicked spoil its pleasantness: as we must love our country, though it treats us unjustly: and as we must love and serve the Supreme Being, despite the superstition and fanaticism which too often dishonour His service.

M. Chappus tells me your health is very unsatisfactory: you must come and recover here in your native place, enjoy its freedom, drink (with me) the milk of its cows, and browse on its grass.

I am yours most philosophically and with sincere esteem.

LII

ON THE EARTHQUAKE OF LISBON

To M. Tronchin, of Lyons

["*M. Tronchin of Lyons*" was one of the honourable family of which Dr. Theodore Tronchin was the most famous member.

"*The Earthquake of Lisbon,*" on All Saints' Day, 1755, which destroyed thirty thousand persons in six minutes, drew from Voltaire not only the mockery of *Candide*, but one of the most beautiful and serious of his writings, *The Poem on the Disaster of*

Lisbon. The disaster is the subject of many of his letters of this period, and profoundly touched his soul.

"*In the best of all possible worlds*"—a scornful version of the "Whatever is, is right" of Pope's *Essay on Man.*]

LES DÉLICES, November 24, 1755.

This is indeed a cruel piece of natural philosophy! We shall find it difficult to discover how the laws of movement operate in such fearful disasters *in the best of all possible worlds*—where a hundred thousand ants, our neighbours, are crushed in a second on our ant-heaps, half, dying undoubtedly in inexpressible agonies, beneath débris from which it was impossible to extricate them, families all over Europe reduced to beggary, and the fortunes of a hundred merchants—Swiss, like yourself—swallowed up in the ruins of Lisbon. What a game of chance human life is! What will the preachers say—especially if the Palace of the Inquisition is left standing? I flatter myself that those reverend fathers, the Inquisitors, will have been crushed just like other people. That ought to teach men not to persecute men: for, while a few sanctimonious humbugs are burning a few fanatics, the earth opens and swallows up all alike.

I believe it is our mountains which save us from earthquakes.

LIII

ON GOOD TASTE IN LITERATURE

To Mdlle. . . . .

[" *Mme. Deshoulières*" was a graceful verse-writer of the seventeenth century. Many of her lines have become maxims.]

LES DÉLICES, June 20, 1756.

I am only an old invalid, mademoiselle, and my not having answered your letter before, and now replying only in prose to your charming verses, prove that my condition is a serious one.

You ask me for advice: your own good taste will afford you all you need. Your study of Italian should further improve that taste which was born in you, and which nobody can give you. Tasso and Ariosto will do much more for you than I can, and reading our best poets is better than all lessons; but, since you are so good as to consult me from so far away, my advice to you is—read only such books as have long been sealed with the universal approval of the public and whose reputation is established. They are few: but you will gain much

more from reading those few than from all the feeble little works with which we are inundated. Good writers are only witty in the right place, they never strive after smartness: they think sensibly, and express themselves clearly. Now, people appear to write exclusively in enigmas. Everything is affected—nothing simple: nature is ignored, and everyone tries to improve on the masterpieces of our language.

Hold fast, mademoiselle, by everything which delights you in them. The smallest affectation is a vice. The Italians, after Tasso and Ariosto, degenerated because they were always trying to be witty: and it is the same with the French. Observe how naturally Mme. de Sévigné and other ladies write: and compare their style with the confused phrases of our minor romances—I cite writers of your own sex because I am sure you can, and will, resemble them. There are passages of Mme. Deshoulières which are equalled by no writer of the present day. If you wish examples of male authors—look how simply and clearly Racine invariably expresses himself. Every reader of his works feels sure that he could himself say in prose what Racine has said in verse. Believe me, everything that is not equally clear, chaste, and simple is worth absolutely nothing.

Your own reflections, mademoiselle, will tell you

all this a hundred times better than I can say it. You will notice that our good writers—Fénelon, Bossuet, Racine, Despréaux—always use the right word. One gets oneself accustomed to talk well by constantly reading those who have written well: it becomes a habit to express our thoughts simply and nobly, without effort. It is not in the nature of a study: it is no trouble to read what is good, and to read that only: our own pleasure and taste are our only masters.

Forgive this long disquisition; you must please attribute it to my obedience to your commands.

I have the honour to be very respectfully yours.

LIV

ON THE CASE OF ADMIRAL BYNG

[In 1756, the French, under the Duc de Richelieu, took Minorca from the English—the English fleet, under Admiral Byng, retiring before the French. Paris went mad with joy. Britain forgot her traditional love of fair play, and wreaked her bitterness at being beaten on her native element, not on the blundering ministry who had commanded him impossibilities, but on *Admiral Byng* himself. In December, 1756, George Keith, Earl Marischal of Scotland (whom Voltaire had

met in Prussia), arrived at Les Délices to plead with the man who was fast becoming Humanitarian-in-Chief of Europe to defend Admiral Byng—now arraigned on a charge of treason and cowardice. Voltaire wrote to his friend Richelieu, who replied in the first of the following letters, vindicating the character and conduct of his foe. Voltaire sent a copy of this letter to Byng with his own. He had met the Admiral many years before in England, but judged it better not to mention the acquaintance. The third letter—Voltaire to Richelieu—shows the fruitlessness of their efforts. Notwithstanding the recommendation to mercy, Byng was shot on March 14, 1757, and his defender, the author of *Candide*, added to it an immortal phrase, "In this country (England) it is as well to put an admiral to death now and then, *to encourage the others*."]

The Duc de Richelieu to Voltaire

December, 1756 (probably).

I am much concerned, sir, about the case of Admiral Byng. I can assure you that all I have seen and heard of him is entirely honourable to him. Since he had done all that could reasonably be expected of him, he was not to be blamed for having suffered defeat.

When two generals engage in battle, though both

are equally men of honour, one *must* be beaten: it is not in the least to M. Byng's discredit that he was. His conduct was throughout that of a clever sailor, and worthy of all admiration. The strength of the two fleets was about the same: the English had thirteen vessels: we had twelve, but ours were much better equipped and smarter. Fortune—which is the goddess of all battles—particularly of sea-battles—was more favourable to us than to our enemies, in causing our fire to have a much greater effect on their vessels than their fire on ours. I am convinced—and it is the general opinion—that, had the English persisted in the fight, their whole fleet would have been destroyed. Nothing could be more unjust than the present campaign against Admiral Byng. All men of honour, all officers in the services, should take a special interest in it.

Voltaire to Admiral Byng

[Voltaire enclosed with this letter a copy of the above letter from Richelieu.]

1757.

Sir, although I am almost unknown to you, I think it is my duty to send you a copy of the letter I have just received from the Maréchal de Richelieu: honour, humanity, and justice demand that it should reach your hands.

This noble and unsolicited testimony of one of the most honest and generous of my fellow-countrymen makes me conclude that your judges will render you the same justice.

I am, with respect,

VOLTAIRE.

Voltaire to the Duc de Richelieu

February 13, 1757.

Your letter on Admiral Byng, sir, was given to that unfortunate man by the Secretary of State, to be used by him as a means of justification. The court martial found him a brave man and a true. But, notwithstanding, by one of those contradictions which are common in all such cases, he was condemned to death on the strength of an ancient law—I know not what—while at the same time he was recommended to mercy—a power which can be exercised by the King alone. The faction which attacked him now accuses him of treachery in trying to turn your letter to account—as if it were that of a man he had bribed to speak for him. So reasons malice: but the clamour of the dogs will not prevent honest people from regarding your letter as that of a just and generous conqueror, prompted only by the magnanimity of his heart.

I suppose you have been busy this last month with all these public events—horrible, trouble-

some, or disagreeable—which succeed each other so rapidly. Those of us who live philosophically in retirement are not the most to be pitied. I will not impose on your time and your kindness by writing at great length: a first gentleman of the chamber, who has the King and the Dauphin to attend to, and who, besides, is at the head of armies and in the secrets of councils, deserves that his correspondents should be brief.

Mme. Denis is always your faithful admirer, and there is no Swiss more tenderly and respectfully attached to you than

THE SWISS VOLTAIRE.

LV

ON THE GREAT ENCYCLOPÆDIA

To M. d'Alembert

[*D'Alembert*, one of the greatest geometricians of his age, was better known to it as the author of the Preface of that famous *Encyclopædia* of which Diderot was the chief promoter, and to which Voltaire was already a contributor. D'Alembert —whose literary style in general has not been unfairly described as "dry as a stick, hard as a stone, and cold as a cucumber"—rose in that

Preface to warmth and eloquence: and by it to fame and the French Academy. In 1756 he stayed for five weeks with Voltaire at Geneva: and met at his table many Calvinistic pastors of that town, to whom his gentle and unassuming character, his detestation of Rome, and his noble mental gifts made him a *persona grata:* while he, on his side, rejoiced to find ministers of religion almost as free-thinking—or so it seemed—as the philosophers themselves. On his return to Paris he wrote for the *Encyclopædia* the famous article, *Geneva*, wherein he set it by the ears by complimenting it on the rationalism of its faith, and as having very often no other but "a perfect Socinianism, rejecting all mystery."

"*The few lines on comedy*" he added to the article heaped fresh fuel on the fire, for they pointed out to Calvinism, which considered it the pet amusement of the devil, the innocence of play-acting. The Calvinistic pastors took counsel together, and drew up what Voltaire calls in this letter their "fine profession of faith": while presently Jean Jacques gave, with "the rushing mighty wind of his inspiration," in his *Letter on Plays*, the case *against* the theatre. The opposition, which always goaded Voltaire to action, caused the gentler d'Alembert to draw back into his shell. Even the spur and incitement of a Voltaire could

not rouse him to firmness and retaliation. A year after this letter was written, the *Encyclopædia*—largely as a consequence of the article *Geneva*—was publicly burnt; the permit to continue publishing it rescinded; and printers and publishers sent to the galleys. To the passionate urging of his "dear and illustrious master" at Les Délices to fight on—to fight to the death—d'Alembert, wounded to the soul, made answer, "I do not know if the Encyclopædia will be continued, but I am sure it will not be continued by me": and he devoted the rest of his life to his geometrical studies and to his long passion for Mdlle. de Lespinasse.

"*Lausanne. Bed; whence I can see ten miles of Lake.*" Besides Les Délices at Geneva, Voltaire had also a house, Monrion, at Ouchy-Lausanne, where, as it was sheltered from the cold winds prevalent at Geneva, he often passed the winter.]

LAUSANNE, BED; whence I can see ten miles of Lake.

January 29, 1758.

Do not speak of your letters as "babble," my brave and worthy philosopher: it is essential, if you please, to discuss and understand the business with which they deal.

Geneva is making a fine profession of faith: you will have the satisfaction of having compelled the heretics to publish a catechism. They complain

of the article on *Actors*, included in that on *Geneva:* but you added these few lines on comedy at the request of the citizens themselves. Thus, you have merely, on the one hand, yielded to the persuasions of the middle class, and, on the other, have repeated the opinion of the ministers—an opinion which has been published in the text-book of one of their theologians, and was publicly discussed everywhere before you spoke.

When I begged you to resume your work on the Encyclopædia, I did not know to what a vile excess libel had been carried, and I was far from suspecting that it was actually prompted by the authorities. I wrote you a long letter by Mme. de Fontaine: she is your neighbour: cannot you manage to go and see her?

It would be sad to think you were leaving the Encyclopædia on account of the article on *Geneva*, as rumour pretends: but it would be sadder still that you should continue to be the victim of annoyances which, in proportion as they are dishonouring to our nation, should rouse you to rebellion.

Are you in close co-operation with M. Diderot and your other colleagues? "A three-fold cord is not quickly broken."

When you all state simultaneously that you will not work without a guarantee of the honourable

freedom which is essential to you, and of the protection to which you are entitled, surely it is not doubtful that you will be implored not to deprive France of a monument necessary to her glory? The clamour will pass: the work will remain.

If you all abandoned the work together, making your own stipulations, that might be well: it would be very unpleasant for you to leave it by yourself: the head must not cut itself off from the body.

When you produce the first volume, add a preface to it which will shame those cowards who have permitted the only writers now working for the glory of the nation to be insulted: and, for God's sake, stop those feeble declamations which are being inserted in your Encyclopædia. Do not give our enemies the right to complain that those who have been unsuccessful, or a dead failure, in the arts can take upon themselves to make the rules for those arts and set those rules by their own absurd fancies. Banish the feeble moralising which pads several articles. The reader wants to know the different acceptations of a word, and detests trivial and commonplace authorities quoted in support of it. What obliges you to disgrace the Encyclopædia with this mass of twaddle and rubbish which gives so good a handle to the critics? and why join beggar's fustian to your cloth-of-gold? Be absolute masters of it, or abandon the whole thing. Unfor-

tunate sons of Paris, you should have undertaken this work in a free country! You have laboured for the booksellers: they take the profits, and leave you the persecution. All this—which I regret with my whole heart for your sakes—makes me find my retirement delightful. Would to God you had never seen a minister when you were here! Keep me posted in everything, I implore you.

LVI

A PROFESSION OF FAITH

To M. . . .

[The anonymous friend to whom this letter was addressed was evidently a Swiss.

"*Montesquieu often lacks arrangement, etc.*" (see Letter XXV, "On Corneille and Racine," and Letter LXXX, "On Monarchy and Despotism," for further details on Montesquieu and his books).

"*His book should be the breviary of those called to rule others.*" Voltaire is here referring to Montesquieu's most famous work, *L'Esprit des Lois*, which Mme. du Deffand wittily summarised as "l'esprit *sur* les lois." All the same, it can claim to be the most lucid and original, as it is undoubtedly the most amusing, work on the science

of law ever published. Sixteen years earlier, Montesquieu had actively opposed Voltaire's election to the French Academy on the grounds, "Voltaire n'est pas beau, il n'est que joli." In a broader and more generous spirit Voltaire criticised his critic—"Humanity had lost its title deeds. Montesquieu found and restored them."]

LES DÉLICES, January 5, 1759.

It is as necessary, my dear friend, to preach tolerance among you as it is among us. With all due deference to you, if you could justify the English, Danish, and Swedish penal laws you would be justifying at the same time our laws against you. They are all, I concede, equally absurd, inhuman, and contrary to good government: but we have simply imitated you. By your laws I am not allowed to buy a tomb in Sichem. If one of your people prefers the mass to the sermon, for the salvation of his soul, he at once ceases to be a citizen, and loses everything—even his national rights. You do not allow any priest to celebrate mass in a low voice, in private, in any of your towns. Have you not driven out all ministers who cannot bring themselves to sign I know not what doctrinal formula? have you not exiled, for a mere yea and nay, those poor, peaceful Memnonists, in spite of the wise representations of the States General,

who received them kindly? are there not still a large number of these exiles in the mountains in the diocese of Basle whom you do not permit to return? and has not a pastor been deposed because he objected to his flock being damned eternally? Confess, my dear philosopher, that you are no wiser than we are: and avow, too, that opinions have caused more trouble on this little globe than plagues and earthquakes. And yet you do not wish us to attack such opinions with our united strength! Would it not be a good thing for the world to overthrow the superstition which in all ages infuriates men one against the other? To worship God: to leave to every man freedom to serve Him according to his own ideas: to love one's neighbours; enlighten them, if one can; pity them, if they are in error: to regard as immaterial, questions which would never have given trouble if no importance had been attached to them: this is my religion, which is worth all your systems and all your symbols.

I have not read any of the books of which you tell me, my dear philosopher: I keep to old works, which teach me something: from the new I learn very little. I confess that Montesquieu often lacks arrangement, in spite of his division into books and chapters: that he sometimes takes an epigram for a definition, and an antithesis for a new idea: that he

is not always correct in his quotations: but he will remain for ever a profound and heaven-sent genius, who thinks and makes his readers think. His book should be the breviary of those called to rule others. He will endure, and the scribblers will be forgotten.

As to your writers on agriculture, I believe that a sensible peasant knows more about it than authors who, from the retirement of their libraries, issue instructions as to how the earth is to be ploughed. I plough, but I do not write on ploughing. Every age has had its hobby. On the revival of learning, people began by quarrelling with each other over dogmas and rules of syntax: a taste for rusty old coins has been succeeded by researches on metaphysics, which nobody understands. These unintelligible questions have been abandoned in favour of pneumatic and electrical machines, which do teach something: then everybody began collecting shells and fossils. After that, some modestly essayed to manage the universe: while others, equally modest, sought to reform empires by new laws. Finally, descending from the sceptre to the plough, new Triptolemies tried to teach men what everybody knows and does much better than they know how to talk about it. Such is the march of changing fashions: but my friendship for you will never change.

LVII

ON "CLARISSA HARLOWE"

To Mme. du Deffand

[*Clarissa Harlowe*, published in nine volumes in 1748, and one of the most famous novels of the century, was, and is, as variously estimated in France as in England. If Voltaire found it dull and copious, Diderot ranked Richardson with Moses and Homer: while that unsentimental old worldling, Mme. du Deffand, was almost as warm in its praises as Haydon, the painter, who read it for seventeen hours at a stretch, and declared that, save by *Othello*, he had never been so moved by any work of genius. The modern reader, if he reads it at all (which, to his loss, he generally does not), is inclined to agree with Voltaire as to its "linkéd sweetness long drawn out": or to echo the criticism of d'Alembert, "La nature est bonne à imiter, mais non pas jusquà l'ennui."

"*I am sorry I once decried him.*" Voltaire had "decried" Rabelais in *The Temple of Taste*—a sort of French *Dunciad*, published nearly thirty years before this letter was written.]

LES DÉLICES, April 12, 1760.

I have not sent you, madam, any of those trifles with which you condescend to while away an idle

moment. For more than six weeks I have broken with all humankind: I have buried myself in my own thoughts: then came the usual country employments, and then a fever. Taking all these things into consideration, you have had nothing, and most likely will have nothing, for some time.

You need, however, only write and say to me, "I want to be amused, I am well, in full feather, and a good humour, and I should like some trifles sent along to me," and you shall have a whole postbag—comic, scientific, historical, or poetic, just as pleases you best—on condition you throw it in the fire when read.

You were so enthusiastic over *Clarissa* that I read it as a relaxation from my work when I was ill: the reading made me feverish. It is cruel for a man as impatient as I am to read nine whole volumes containing nothing at all, and serving no purpose whatever but to give a glimpse of Miss Clarissa's love for a profligate like Lovelace. I said to myself: "Were all these people my friends and relatives, I could not take the least interest in them." I see nothing in the author but a cleverish man who knows the invincible curiosity of the human species, and who holds out hopes of gratifying it volume after volume—in order to sell them. When at last I found Clarissa in a house of ill fame, I was greatly touched.

Pierre Corneille's *Théodore* (who wants to get into La Fillons from a Christian motive) does not approach *Clarissa*, either in its situations or in its pathos; but, save that part where the pretty English girl finds herself in that disreputable place, I confess that nothing in the novel gave me the least satisfaction, and I should be sorry to have to read it through again. The only good books, it seems to me, are those which can be re-read without weariness.

The only good books of that particular kind are those which set a picture constantly before the imagination, and soothe the ear by their harmony. People want music and painting, with a few little philosophical precepts thrown in now and again with a reasonable discretion. For this reason Horace, Virgil, and Ovid always please—save in the translations, which spoil them.

After *Clarissa* I re-read some chapters of Rabelais, such as the fight of brother Jean des Entommeures, and the meeting of the council of Pierochole: I know them almost by heart: but I re-read them with the greatest pleasure, for they give a most vivid picture of life.

Not that I compare Rabelais with Horace: but if Horace is the first writer of good epistles, Rabelais, at his best, is the first of buffoons. Two men of this kind in a nation are not needed: but one there must be. I am sorry I once decried him.

But there are pleasures superior to all this sort of thing: those of seeing the grass grow in the fields, and the abundant harvest ripen. That is man's true life: all the rest is vanity.

Forgive me, madam, for speaking to you of a pleasure enjoyed through the eyes: you only know the pleasures of the soul. The way you bear your affliction is wholly admirable: you enjoy, anyhow, all the advantages of society. It is true that that often comes to mean merely giving one's opinion on the news of the day; which, in the long run, seems to me exceedingly insipid. Only our tastes and passions make this world supportable. You replace the passions by philosophy, a poor substitute: while I replace them with the tender and respectful attachment I have always felt for you.

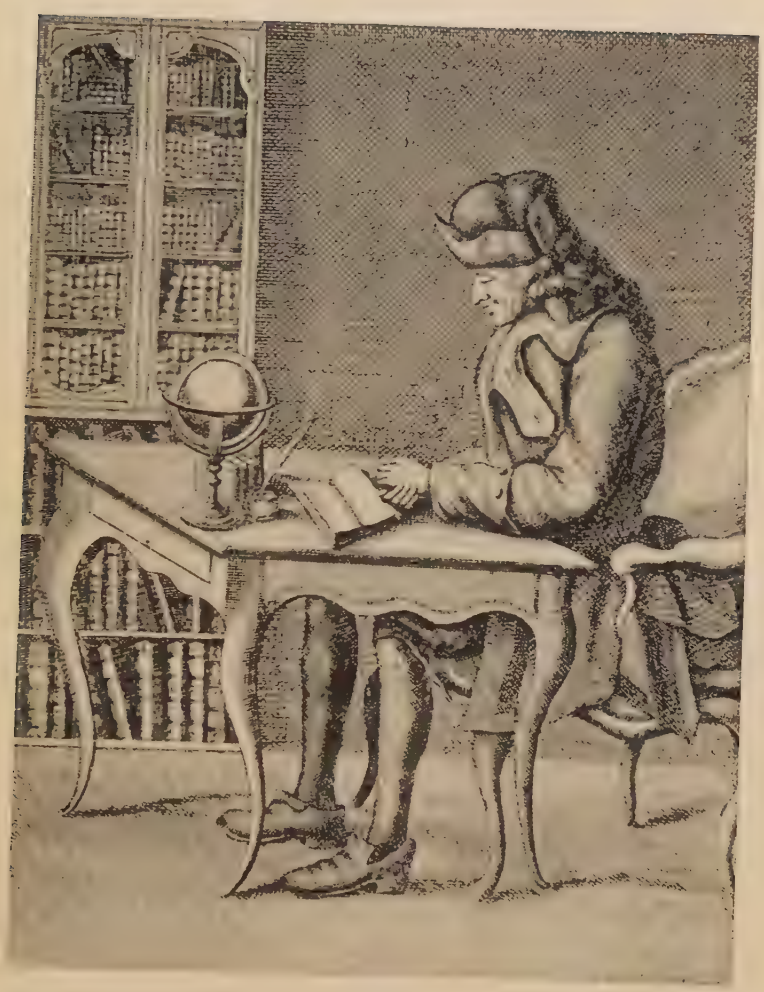
Wish President Hénault good health from me: and I hope he will not quite forget me.

LVIII

IMPEACHING A TRADUCER

To M. Palissot

[At the end of 1758 Voltaire had bought the charming little estate of *Ferney*, about three miles from Geneva.



VOLTAIRE AT FERNEY

From an old print

His lively and quite youthful enjoyment in rebuilding the house and the ugly little church which stood in its grounds was marred in the spring of 1760 by the production in Paris of a play, by Charles Palissot, a journalist, called *The Philosophers*, ridiculing the philosophic party—particularly Diderot, Helvétius, Duclos, and other of Voltaire's friends. What made the thing particularly base was that in 1755 Palissot had been Voltaire's guest at Les Délices, with the poet Patu, who was a friend of David Garrick. It is true, Voltaire was not personally attacked in the play: but he replied for his brethren in a scathing burlesque on *The Philosophers* called *The Scotch Girl*, in which he revenged himself not only on Palissot but on Fréron, an older and deadlier foe, and also a critic and journalist. *The Scotch Girl* he immediately followed by his romantic tragedy, *Tancred* which Palissot had admired, or of which he had expressed admiration. Palissot's next stab was the publication of Voltaire's private correspondence with him: which drew upon himself the following letter.

"*The whole Academy was exasperated with Lefranc's Discourse.*" The Marquis Lefranc de Pompignan, who had succeeded Voltaire as Historiographer of France, and who had fallen upon the philosophic party in his address, delivered on taking his chair in the French Academy on March

10, 1760. Voltaire had retaliated in a succession of deadly little *brochures*—the *Whens*, the *Whats*, the *Whys*, and the *Whos*.]

FERNEY, NEAR GENEVA, September 24, 1760.

I am forced to complain, sir, of your having published my letters without my consent. Such a proceeding is neither philosophical nor worldly-wise. I am, however, answering your letter of September 13th, at the same time begging you, by every social obligation, not to make public what I write for you alone.

I begin by thanking you for the part you have the kindness to play in *Tancred's* little success. You are right in not liking scenic display and action on the stage, except when both are connected with the interest of the piece: you write too well not to wish the poet to take precedence of the scene-painter.

I am also of your opinion as to literary battles: but you must confess that, in any war, the aggressor is alone to blame before God and man. After forty years I have lost my patience. I have given sundry little pats with my paw to my enemies, just to let them know that, in spite of my sixty-seven years, I am not paralysed. You set about that business earlier than I did: *you* attacked people who did not attack you; and, unfortunately, I am the friend of several persons into whom you have

dug your claws. I thus find myself between you and my friends whom you are tearing to pieces: you will confess you are putting me into a very awkward position. I was much touched by your visit to Les Délices: I felt a great liking for you and M. Patu, who came with you: and my affection, divided between yourself and him, was centred on you alone after his death. Your letters have been a great pleasure to me: I have been much interested in your fortunes and your success: our intercourse, which gave me so much pleasure, has ended by calling down on me the stinging reproaches of my friends. They complain of my corresponding with a man who insults them. To put the finishing touch to this disagreeable situation, someone has sent me the notes printed in the margin of your letters: these notes are of the severest character.

You ought not to be astonished that the offended should not spare the offender. This dispute degrades letters: they were already sufficiently despised and persecuted by the majority of those men who think only of money.

It is a horrible thing when those who should be united by their tastes and feelings abuse each other like Jansenists and Molinists. Those little scoundrels in the black cassocks opposed men of letters because they were jealous of them. Every thinking being ought to rise up against these fanatical

hypocrites. They deserve to be held up to the execration of their own age and of posterity. Judge how grieved I must be that you have fought under their banners!

My consolation is that justice is done at last. The whole Academy was exasperated with Lefranc's Discourse: you might have had a chair in that Academy if you had not publicly insulted two of its members in your play. You know that our friends easily abandon us, and that our enemies are implacable.

This affair has robbed me of my cheerfulness, and left me, so far as you are concerned, wholly regretful. Pompignan and Fréron amused me: you have saddened me.

Feeble as I am, I write to tell you that I shall never console myself for an episode which brings so much discredit on literature: that it has become a degrading and abominable profession, and that I regret having loved it, and you.

LIX

SOCIAL CONDITIONS IN 1760

To M. de Bastide

[*M. de Bastide* was the author of a book called *The New Spectator*.

This letter gives a good example of Voltaire's delicately ironical method, though unfortunately much of the delicacy is inevitably lost in a translation.]

1760.

I do not suppose, Spectator of the World, that you propose to fill your pages with facts concerning the physical world. Socrates, Epictetus, Marcus Aurelius, allowed all the spheres to gravitate one on the top of the other, that they might devote themselves to the regulation of manners. Are your speculations also thus concentrated on morality? But what do you expect from a morality which the teachers of the nations have already preached about with so much success?

I agree with you that it is somewhat of a reflection on human nature that money accomplishes everything and merit almost nothing: that the real workers, behind the scenes, have hardly a modest subsistence, while certain selected personages flaunt on the stage: that fools are exalted to the skies, and genius is in the gutter: that a father disinherits six virtuous children to make his first-born—often a scapegrace—heir to all his possessions: that a luckless wretch who comes to grief, or to any unhappy end in a foreign country, leaves the fortune of his natural inheritors to the treasury of that state.

It is sad to see—I confess it again—those who toil in poverty, and those who produce nothing, in luxury: great proprietors who claim the very birds that fly and the fish that swim: trembling vassals who do not dare to free their houses from the wild boar that devours them: fanatics who want to burn everyone who does not pray to God after their own fashion: violence in high places which engenders violence in the people: might making right not only amongst nations but amongst individuals.

And it is this state of things, common to all lives and to all places, which you expect to change! Behold the folly of you moralists! Mount the pulpit with Bourdaloue, or wield the pen like La Bruyère, and you waste your time—the world will go its way!

A government which could provide for all would do more in a year than the order of preaching friars has done since their institution.

In a very short space of time Lycurgus raised the Spartans above ordinary humanity. The force of Confucius' wisdom, two thousand years ago, is still felt in China.

But, as neither you nor I are made to govern, if you have such an itching for reform, reform our virtues, which in excess may well become prejudicial to the prosperity of the state. It is easier to reform virtues than vices. The list of exagger-

ated virtues would be a long one: I will mention a few, and you will easily guess the rest.

I observe, walking about the country, that the children of the soil eat much less than they require: it is difficult to conceive this immoderate passion for abstinence. It even looks as if they had got into their heads that it will be accounted to them for virtue if their beasts also are half-starved.

What is the result? Men and beasts waste away, their stock becomes feeble, work is suspended, and the cultivation of the land suffers.

Patience is another virtue carried to excess, perhaps, in the country. If the tax collectors limited themselves to executing the will of their lord, to be patient would be a duty: but if you question these good folk who supply us with bread, they will tell you that the manner in which the taxes are levied is a hundred times more onerous than the tax itself. Their patience ruins them and their landowners with them.

The evangelical pulpit has reproached kings and the great a hundred times for their harshness to the poor. The fault has been corrected—in excess. The royal antechambers overflow with servants better fed and better clothed than the lords of the parishes whence they come. This excess of charity robs the country of soldiers, and the land of labourers.

Spectator of the World, do not let the scheme of reforming our virtues shock you: the founders of religious orders have reformed each other. Another reason for encouragement is that it is perhaps easier to discern an excess of good than to pronounce on the nature of evil. Believe me, dear *Spectator*, I cannot urge you too strongly to reform our virtues: men cling too tightly to their vices.

LX

ON LADY MARY WORTLEY MONTAGU

To M. le Comte d'Argental

[" *The letters of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, now appearing in England*" (see Letter XLVII, "On Inoculation").

It is almost unique to find a Frenchman estimating the correspondence of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu above that of Mme. de Sévigné: but the fact indeed is, as Voltaire shows, that Lady Mary had wider and larger interests, and that, compared with her broad and shrewdly humorous description of her travels in the East, the letters of Mme. de Sévigné are bloodless and elegant—the letters which made Napoleon feel as if he had been "eating snowballs," and which Lady Mary herself

dismissed (most unfairly) as the tittle-tattle of a fine lady or an old nurse.

Lady Mary died in 1762, a year before this letter was written.]

1763.

My dear angels, it is a great pity that the *Literary Gazette* allowed itself to be prejudiced in the account it gave of the *Letters* of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, which are appearing in England. The *Letters* of Mme. de Sévigné are suited to the French, those of Lady Montagu to all nations. If they are ever well translated (and that would be a difficult task) you will be delighted to find in them so much that is new and curious, embellished by knowledge, taste, and good writing. Just fancy that for more than a thousand years no traveller able to gain and give information had reached Constantinople through the countries which Lady Montagu traversed: she has seen the native land of Orpheus and Alexander: she has dined tête-à-tête with the widow of the Emperor Mustapha; she has translated Turkish songs and declarations of love, which are quite in the style of the Song of Songs; she has observed manners resembling those described by Homer, and has travelled with her Homer in her hand. We learn from her to rid ourselves of many of our prejudices. The Turks are neither such brutes nor so brutal as has been said.

She found as many Deists at Constantinople as there are in Paris or London. I confess I am grieved that she treats both our music and our holy religion with the most profound disdain: but we must try to get used to this trifling mortification.

Pray tell me what happens to this *Literary Gazette*. Will the Duc de Praslin's support of it go for nothing? Are they working at it, and putting a little salt into it? No good dishes without salt! It is the sauce that makes the cook.

LXI

ON RIDICULE

To M. Bertrand

["*My friend Jean-Jacques will not allow comedy*," against which Rousseau had protested in his *Letter on Plays* (see Letter LV, "On the Great Encyclopædia").]

January 8, 1764.

I shall never cease, my dear sir, to preach tolerance from the housetops—despite the groans of your priests and the outcries of ours—until persecution is no more. The progress of reason is slow, the roots of prejudice lie deep. Doubtless, I shall

never see the fruits of my efforts, but they are seeds which may one day germinate.

You are of the opinion, my dear friend, that jesting is not suitable to serious subjects. We Frenchmen are naturally lively: the Swiss are grave.

Is it possible that, in the delightful canton of Vaud, which in itself inspires cheerfulness, solemnity is an effect of the government? Depend upon it, nothing is so efficacious in crushing superstition as ridicule. I do not confound superstition with religion, my dear philosopher.

Religion is the target of pride and folly: superstition the objective of wisdom and reason. Superstition has always produced trouble and discord: religion maintains brotherhood, learning, and peace. My friend Jean-Jacques will not allow comedy, and you set your face against innocent jests. In spite of your solemnity, I am yours most affectionately.

LXII

THE CASE OF CALAS AND OF THE SIRVENS

To M. Damilaville

[*Damilaville* was Voltaire's Paris correspondent and factotum in general, and was constantly em-

ployed in transmitting books and news to Ferney.

This letter—meant for the public eye as much as for M. Damilaville's—gives an excellent account, in brief, of the two great *causes célèbrès* which long engrossed Voltaire's superb talents and energies, and which he made famous all over Europe. What the letter lays little stress on, is his own sacrifices, in money as well as in the time he valued far above money, on his burning zeal and his invincible perseverance, which at last brought both cases to triumphant conclusions. On behalf of the *Calas* he had written not only *Memoirs* and *Declarations* and *The History of Elizabeth Canning and of the Calas* (taking care that they should be translated into foreign tongues and published in foreign countries) but also the famous *Treatise on Tolerance*, which still lives, and dealt the death-blow to the cruel injustice hitherto meted to the Protestant in Catholic countries. On March 9, 1765, just a week after this letter was written, the innocence of Calas and his family was publicly declared by forty judges of the Council of Paris, unanimous in their verdict; and it only remained to him, who, it is said, loved none of his titles to fame so well as that of the "saviour of the Calas," to promote the further welfare of the Calas boys and of their mother.

The *Sirvens'* case was less dramatic. As Voltaire said, "it lacked a scaffold." But when they clung about his feet and implored him to save them also, he was not the man to pass by on the other side as his priestly friend advised him.

For seven years he laboured to get their case re-tried, giving to it unstintingly, as he had given to the Calas, his time, fame, brains, money, and influence: but it was not until 1771, when he was seventy-seven years old, that the Parliament of Toulouse completely exculpated the accused; having taken, as Voltaire said, two hours to condemn innocence and nine years to give it justice.

"*The new Memoir of M. de Beaumont.*" Élie de Beaumont—hereafter a famous and brilliant *avocat*—was quite unknown when Voltaire chose him to be, with d'Alembert and Mariette (already celebrated), counsel for Mme. Calas—Voltaire paying all expenses himself. De Beaumont's *Memoir* showed "three impossibilities" in the way of Calas' having murdered his son. "The fourth," said Voltaire, "is that of resisting your arguments."

"*A lady whose generosity is as noble as her birth*" —the Duchesse d'Enville, a patient of Voltaire's friend, Dr. Tronchin. She helped the Calas not only with money but by representing their case to Saint-Florentin, Chancellor of France.

"*It has not found Mariettes, Beaumonts and Loi-*

seau." In point of fact, in a letter written a few days after this one, Voltaire announced that Élie de Beaumont would defend the Sirvens, as he had defended the Calas.

"*I was myself giving shelter to a Jesuit*"—Father Adam ("but not," as Voltaire said, "the first of men"), whose acquaintance Voltaire had made at Colmar, and to whom he gave hospitality for thirteen years.

"*Who else . . . has defended the memory of a great prince against the abominable inventions of a writer, whoever he may be.*" The "great prince" was the Regent Orléans. The traducer, as Voltaire knew very well, was that La Beaumelle who had published Voltaire's *Century of Louis XIV* with notes of his own (see Letter LI, "On the Advantages of Civilisation and Literature," and Letter XL, "The Quarrel with Maupertuis").

"*The vile mercenary who twice a month outrages sense, etc.*" This was Fréron, Voltaire's old enemy, in his scandalous periodical the *Année Littéraire* (see Letter LVIII, "Impeaching a Traducer").

"*The sage of Montbar*" was Buffon, the famous naturalist.

"*The sage of Voré*" was Voltaire's friend and protégé, Helvétius (see Letter XXII, "How to Write Verse"). After Helvétius settled on his estate at Voré, in Burgundy, in 1751, he had shown

himself—that rare phenomenon in the eighteenth century—a model landowner and an enlightened philanthropist.]

FERNEY, March 1, 1765.

My dear friend, I have devoured the new *Memoir* of M. de Beaumont on the innocence of the Calas; I have admired and wept over it, but it told me nothing I did not know; I have long been convinced, and it was I who was lucky enough to furnish the first proofs.

You would like to know how this European protest against the judicial murder of the unhappy Calas, broken on the wheel at Toulouse, managed to reach a little unknown corner of the world, between the Alps and the Jura, a hundred miles from the scene of the fearful event.

Nothing more clearly reveals the existence of that imperceptible chain which links all the events of this miserable world.

At the end of March, 1762, a traveller, who had come through Languedoc and arrived in my little retreat two miles from Geneva, told me of the sacrifice of Calas, and assured me that he was innocent. I answered him that the crime was not a probable one, but that it was still more improbable that Calas' judges should, without any motive, break an innocent man on the wheel.

I heard the next day that one of the children of this unfortunate man had taken refuge in Switzerland, fairly near my cottage. His flight made me presume the guilt of the family. However, I reflected that the father had been condemned to death for having, by himself, assassinated his son on account of his religion, and that, at the time of his death, this father was sixty-nine years old. I never remember to have read of any old man being possessed by so horrible a fanaticism. I have always observed that this mania is usually confined to young people, with weak, heated, and unstable imaginations, inflamed by superstition. The fanatics of the Cevennes were madmen from twenty to thirty years of age, trained to prophesy since childhood. Almost all the convulsionists I had seen in any large numbers in Paris were young girls and boys. Among the monks the old are less carried away and less liable to the fury of the zealot than those just out of their novitiate. The notorious assassins, goaded by religious frenzy, have all been young people, as have all those who have pretended to be possessed—no one ever saw an old man exorcised. This reasoning made me doubt a crime, which was, moreover, unnatural. I was ignorant of its circumstances.

I had young Calas to my house. I expected to find him a religious enthusiast, such as his country

has sometimes produced. I found a simple and ingenuous youth, with a gentle and very interesting countenance, who, as he talked to me, made vain efforts to restrain his tears. He told me that he was at Nîmes, apprenticed to a manufacturer, when he heard that his whole family was about to be condemned to death at Toulouse, and that almost all Languedoc believed them guilty. He added that, to escape so fearful a disgrace, he had come to Switzerland to hide himself.

I asked him if his father and mother were of a violent character. He told me that they had never beaten any one of their children, and that never were parents more tender and indulgent.

I confess that no more was needed to give me a strong presumption in favour of the innocence of the family. I gathered fresh information from two merchants of Geneva, of proven honesty, who had lodged at the Calas' house in Toulouse. They confirmed me in my opinion. Far from believing the Calas family to be fanatics and parricides, I thought I saw that it was the fanatics who had accused and ruined them. I had long known of what party spirit and calumny are capable.

But what was my astonishment when, having written to Languedoc on the subject of this extraordinary story, Catholics and Protestants answered that there was no doubt as to the crime of the Calas!

I was not disheartened. I took the liberty of writing to those in authority in the province, to the governors of neighbouring provinces, and to ministers of state: all unanimously advised me not to mix myself up in such a horrible affair: everybody blamed me: and I persisted: this is what I did.

Calas' widow (from whom, to fill to the brim her cup of misery and insult, her daughters had been forcibly removed) had retired into solitude, where she lived on the bread of tears, and awaited death. I did not enquire if she was, or was not, attached to the Protestant religion, but only if she believed in a God who rewarded virtue and punished crime. I asked her if she would sign a solemn declaration, as before God, that her husband died innocent: she did not hesitate. She had to be persuaded to leave her retirement and to undertake the journey to Paris.

It is then apparent that, if there are great crimes on the earth, there are as many virtues; and that, if superstition produces horrible sufferings, philosophy redresses them.

A lady, whose generosity is as noble as her birth, and who was staying at Geneva to have her daughters inoculated, was the first to succour this unhappy family. French people living in this country seconded her: the travelling English distinguished themselves: there was a beneficent ri-

valry between the two nations as to which should give the more to virtue so cruelly oppressed.

As to the sequel, who knows it better than you? Who has served innocence with a zeal as faithful and courageous? Who has more generously encouraged the voice of those orators whom all France and Europe paused to hear? The days when Cicero justified, before an assembly of legislators, Amerinus accused of parricide, are with us again. A few people, calling themselves pious, have raised their voices against the Calas: but, for the first time since fanaticism was established, the wise have silenced them.

What great victories reason is winning among us! But would you believe, my dear friend, that the family of the Calas, so efficiently succoured and avenged, was not the only one that religion accused of parricide—was not the only one sacrificed to the furies of religious persecution? There is a case yet more pitiable, because, while experiencing the same horrors, it has not had the same consolations: it has not found Mariettes, Beaumonts, and Loiseau.

There appears to be a horrible mania, indigenous to Languedoc, originally sown there by the inquisitors in the train of Simon de Montfort, which, ever since then, from time to time hoists its flag.

A native of Castres, named Sirven, had three daughters. As the religion of the family is the so-

called reformed religion, the youngest of the daughters was torn from the arms of her mother. She was put into a convent, where they beat her to help her to learn her catechism: she went mad: and threw herself into a well at a place not far from her parents' house. The bigots thereupon made up their minds that her father, mother, and sisters had drowned the child. The Catholics of the province are absolutely convinced that one of the chief points of the Protestant religion is that the fathers and mothers are bound to hang, strangle, or drown any of their children whom they suspect of any leaning towards the Catholic faith. Precisely at the moment when the Calas were in irons, this fresh scaffold was uplifted.

The story of the drowned girl reached Toulouse at once. Everyone declared it to be a fresh instance of murderous parents. The public fury grew daily: Calas was broken on the wheel: Sirven, his wife, and his daughter were accused. Sirven, terrified, had just time to flee with his delicate family. They went on foot, with no creature to help them, across precipitous mountains, deep in snow. One of the daughters gave birth to an infant among the glaciers: and, herself dying, bore her dying child in her arms: they finally took the road to Switzerland.

The same fate which brought the children of the

Calas to me, decided that the Sirvens should also appeal to me. Picture to yourself, my friend, four sheep accused by the butchers of having devoured a lamb: for that is what I saw. I despair of describing to you so much innocence and so much sorrow. What ought I to have done? and what would you have done in my place? Could I rest satisfied with cursing human nature? I took the liberty of writing to the first president of Languedoc, a wise and good man: but he was not at Toulouse. I got one of my friends to present a petition to the vice-chancellor. During this time, near Castres, the father, mother, and two daughters were executed in effigy: their property confiscated and dissipated—to the last sou.

Here was an entire family—honest, innocent, virtuous—left to disgrace and beggary among strangers: some, doubtless, pitied them: but it is hard to be an object of pity to one's grave! I was finally informed that remission of their sentence was a possibility. At first, I believed that it was the judges from whom that pardon must be obtained. You will easily understand that the family would sooner have begged their bread from door to door, or have died of want, than ask a pardon which admitted a crime too horrible to be pardonable. But how could justice be obtained? how could they go back to prison in a country where

half the inhabitants still said that Calas' murder was just? Would there be a second appeal to Council? would anyone try to rouse again the public sympathy which, it might well be, the misfortunes of the Calas had exhausted, and which would weary of refuting such accusations, of reinstating the condemned, and of confounding their judges?

Are not these two tragic events, my friend, so rapidly following each other, proofs of the inevitable decrees of fate, to which our miserable species is subject? A terrible truth, so much insisted on in Homer and Sophocles: but a useful truth, since it teaches us to be resigned and to learn how to suffer.

Shall I add that, while the incredible calamities of the Calas and the Sirvens wrung my heart, a man, whose profession you will guess from what he said, reproached me for taking so much interest in two families who were strangers to me? "Why do you mix yourself up in such things?" he asked; "let the dead bury their dead." I answered him, "I found an Israelite in the desert—an Israelite covered in blood; suffer me to pour a little wine and oil into his wounds: you are the Levite, leave me to play the Samaritan."

It is true that, as a reward for my trouble, I have been treated quite as a Samaritan: a defamatory

libel appeared under the titles of *A Pastoral Instruction* and *A Charge:* but it may well be forgotten—a Jesuit wrote it. The wretch did not know then that I was myself giving shelter to a Jesuit! Could I prove more conclusively that we should regard our enemies as our brethren?

Your passions are humanity, a love of truth, and a hatred of calumny. Our friendship is founded on the similarity of our characters. I have spent my life in seeking and publishing the truth which I love. Who else among modern historians has defended the memory of a great prince against the abominable inventions of a writer, whoever he may be, who might well be called the traducer of kings, ministers, and military commanders, and who now has not a single reader?

I have only done in the fearful cases of the Calas and the Sirvens what all men do: I have followed my bent. A philosopher's is not to pity the unhappy—it is to be of use to them.

I know how furiously fanaticism attacks philosophy, whose two daughters, Truth and Tolerance, fanaticism would fain destroy as it destroyed the Calas: while philosophy only wishes to render innocuous the offspring of fanaticism, Falsehood and Persecution.

Those who do not reason try to bring into discredit those who do: they have confused the philosopher with the sophist: and have greatly deceived themselves. The true philosopher can be aroused against the calumny which so often attacks himself: he can overwhelm with everlasting contempt the vile mercenary who twice a month outrages sense, good taste, and morality: he can even expose to ridicule, in passing, those who insult literature in the sanctuary where they should have honoured it: but he knows nothing of cabals, underhand dealings, or petty revenge. Like the sage of Montbar, like the sage of Voré, he knows how to make the land fruitful and those who dwell on it happier. The real philosopher clears uncultivated ground, adds to the number of ploughs and, so, to the number of inhabitants: employs and enriches the poor: encourages marriages and finds a home for the orphan: does not grumble at necessary taxes, and puts the agriculturist in a condition to pay them promptly. He expects nothing from others, and does them all the good he can. He has a horror of hypocrisy, but he pities the superstitious: and, finally, he knows how to be a friend.

I perceive that I am painting your portrait: the resemblance would be perfect, were you so fortunate as to live in the country.

LXIII

THE CHEVALIER DE LA BARRE

To M. d'Alembert

[On October 1, 1765, the young *Chevalier de la Barre* had been arrested on a charge of mutilating crucifixes, insulting a religious procession, and "uttering blasphemies" in Abbeville. On February 28, 1766, he, d'Etallonde (a friend, who had escaped to Prussia), and Moisnel, a boy of eighteen, were condemned to death, after having their tongues cut out and their hands cut off. Ten of the best *avocats* in Paris (the "ten humane and upright judges" of this letter) declared the brutal sentence illegal. A public appeal against it was made to the King. The case was re-tried at Paris, and the sentence confirmed. On July 1, 1766, la Barre (he was scarcely twenty) died "with the firmness of Socrates," after having been put to the torture. With his body was burnt, with other contraband works, the first volume of *The Philosophical Dictionary* of Voltaire—who, with many others, had believed up to the last in a reprieve. As it was considered that the works of the philosophers—and of the Philosopher-in-Chief, chiefly—had been largely responsible for la Barre's folly, Voltaire went for safety to Rolle, in Vaud.

There he wrote his noble tract in the cause of humanity, *The Death of the Chevalier de la Barre*, which, as he hoped, "frightened the carnivorous beasts off others," not only saved Moisnel from a punishment so barbarously disproportionate to the crime, but forced the judges to drop the case altogether. He also obtained King Frederick's protection for d'Étallonde: and in 1775, when d'Étallonde was at Ferney, pleaded for the restitution of his civil rights in a pamphlet entitled *The Cry of Innocent Blood* (see also Letter LXVIII, "The Case of Martin").

"*A lieutenant-general gagged*"—General Lally (see Letter LXXXIV, "The Last Letter").

"*Five young men condemned to be burnt for follies which deserved Saint-Lazare.*" There were really only three, d'Étallonde, Moisnel, and the Chevalier de la Barre: Voltaire was as yet imperfectly acquainted with the details of the case. Saint Lazare was the house of correction for juvenile offenders.

"*The Preface of the King of Prussia.*" This was a *Preface* to a volume entitled *Extracts from Bayle's Dictionary* which had appeared in Berlin in 1766. The King turned the *Preface* into a panegyric of the proscribed and free-thinking Bayle (see Letter XII, "On the Liberty of the Press: and on Theatres").

"*The theologian Vernet*" was a Calvinistic pastor of Geneva, with whom Voltaire had quarrelled on the vexed subject of play-acting. Vernet made the mistake of attacking Voltaire in print. Voltaire replied in a *Dialogue between a Priest and a Protestant Minister*, which caused Vernet "to complain to the Council of Geneva that he was being held up to ridicule." To this complaint Voltaire—just two months before this letter was written—had made answer in one of the most stinging personal satires that ever fell from even his pen and was entitled *The Praise of Hypocrisy*.]

July 18, 1766.

Brother Damilaville has doubtless sent you, my dear philosopher, the "Narrative" of Abbeville. I cannot conceive how thinking beings can live in a land of apes who so often turn into tigers. For my part, I am ashamed to be even on the frontier. Truly, this is the moment to break all one's ties, and hide the shame and horror of one's soul in some far off land. I have not been able to get the report of the barristers' consultation: you doubtless have seen it—and shuddered. The moment for jesting has gone by: witticisms do not accord with massacres. What! these Busirises in wig and gown condemn to death in the most horrible tortures children of sixteen! and that against the judgment

of ten humane and upright judges! And the nation allows it! People discuss it for five minutes, and then go on to the Opéra-Comique: and inhumanity, growing more and more insolent on the strength of our silence, to-morrow will cut the throats for which her fingers are itching—yours, first of all, for you have raised your voice against her.

Here, on one hand, is Calas broken on the wheel; on the other, Sirven hanged; a little further from home, a lieutenant-general gagged; and, a fortnight later, five young men condemned to be burnt for follies which deserved Saint-Lazare. What is the use of the *Preface* of the King of Prussia? Can he remedy such horrible crimes as these? Is this the land of gaiety and philosophy? It is rather that of the Massacre of St. Bartholomew. The Inquisition would not have dared to decide as these Jansenist judges have decided. Tell me, I beg you, what is being said, since nothing is being done. It is a feeble consolation to know that such monsters are held in abhorrence, but it is the only one that remains to our impotence, and I pray you to let me have it. The Prince of Brunswick is beside himself with indignation, rage, and pity. Redouble these passions in my heart by two words in your handwriting sent, by *petite poste*, to brother Damilaville. Your friendship, and that

of a few other reasonable beings, is the only pleasure I have left.

The mistake of the *Preface* consists in supposing that the words *In principio erat*, etc., have been tampered with. They are two passages on the Trinity which have been interpolated into the Epistle of St. John. What a pity it all is! The time lost in unearthing errors might have been employed in discovering truths.

N. B. The theologian Vernet complained to the Council of Geneva that he was being held up to ridicule: the Council offered him a written testimony to his morality—as if to say that he had not been a highway robber, nor even a pickpocket. This last part of the guarantee seems somewhat rash.

LXIV

ON ROUSSEAU IN ENGLAND

To M. Mariott, Advocate-General of England

["*M. Mariott*"—Sir James Marriott, appointed advocate-general of England in 1764 "through interest rather than superior merit," was a clever and versatile person, lacking depth and solidity. His poems are entirely and justly forgotten.

"*Jean-Jacques, to whom you refer*" — Jean-Jacques Rousseau (see Letter LI, "On the Advantages of Civilisation and Literature"). . Since the publication of *Candide* in 1759, when Voltaire had withered by a grin Rousseau's and Pope's comfortable optimism, Rousseau and Voltaire had fallen out much more seriously on the vexed question of play-acting: Rousseau having made answer to d'Alembert's remarks in favour of it (see Letter LV, "On the Great Encyclopædia") in his famous *Letter on Plays*, wherein he turned his back on his friends, the philosophers, and with the matchless glow and warmth of his irresistible style, gave the Case against the Theatre. In 1760 he published *The New Éloïsa*, that tissue of brilliant absurdities, whose sophism Voltaire exposed in four letters, signed the Marquis de Ximènes: while in 1762 Voltaire was laughing at the long-winded *Émile* which had been publicly burnt in Geneva, as in Paris, so that it was only natural (though it was not the fact) that Rousseau should think that the Patriarch of Ferney had helped to light the fire. It was at this time that Rousseau was meeting—at the house of Baron d'Holbach and elsewhere—David Hume, the historian, who was then in Paris as secretary to the British embassy. The hostility of the French government towards *Émile* compelling Rousseau to fly from France, Hume offered

him a house in England. Rousseau arrived in that country in January, 1766, and had soon persuaded himself that Hume's generosity was prompted by sinister motives, that he (Rousseau) was beset by spies and "suspect" of the British government. He proved indeed, as he spent his life in proving, that, as Voltaire said, he was "completely mad": or at least, as Dryden put it,

> "Great wits are sure to madness near allied,
> And thin partitions do their bounds divide."

"*By way of the great St. Bernard, the most horrible place in the world.*" A strong distaste for the wilder aspects of nature, far from being peculiar to Voltaire, was nearly as common in the eighteenth century as it had been in the sixteenth, when the Bishop of Ely, crossing the Alps by Mont-Cenis, declared it to be "rather a hell than a highway." "*The rocks of Derbyshire*" made that county "*the vilest in England*" for Voltaire: *sauvage* being for him literally "savage" as regarded scenery.

"*If you see Mr. Franklin*"—Benjamin Franklin (see Letter LXXXI, "A Dying Testimony," and Letter LXXXII, "Paris in 1778").]

February 26, 1767.

Sir, I have made up my mind to write to you via Calais rather than Holland because, in men's

dealings with each other, as in physics, the shorter way is always the better way.

It is true, I have let nearly three months go by without answering you: the fact is, I am older than Milton and nearly as blind. As one always envies one's neighbour, I feel jealous of Lord Chesterfield who is deaf. Reading seems to me to be much more essential in a quiet life than conversation. Certainly, a good book is much more valuable than all the chance things one hears said. I believe that people who wish to improve themselves should set a higher value on their eyes than on their ears: but those who merely wish to be amused are, I agree with all my heart, better blind and able to listen to the gossip of the day.

I expect your lively imagination is often much bored by the exacting little duties incidental to your position. No one would want to be solicitor-general if he were not supported by hope and the esteem of the public.

A man who writes such charming verses as you do must have a great deal of courage to occupy himself with people's quarrels, and in guessing the intentions of a testator and the meaning of the laws.

My bad health has always prevented me from devoting myself to the business of the world: my illnesses have thus done me great service. I

have lived for fifteen years in retirement with my family, in the midst of the loveliest country under heaven. When nature brings the spring, it restores my eyesight, of which it robs me in the winter: so I experience the pleasure of being born again, of which other men know nothing.

Jean-Jacques, to whom you refer, has left his own country for yours, as I left mine long ago for his, or anyhow for its neighbourhood. Behold how men are the sport of fate! His Sacred Majesty, Chance, decides everything.

Cardinal Bentivoglio, whom you quote to me, certainly is not too fond of the Swiss and speaks very ill of their country: but that is because he travelled by way of the St. Bernard, the most horrible place in the world. The Vaudois country, on the contrary, and that of Geneva, particularly Gex, where I live, are like a delightful garden. Half Switzerland is hell, the other half paradise.

As you say, Rousseau has chosen the vilest county in England: everybody seeks what is best fitted for him: but the beautiful banks of the Thames must not be judged by the rocks of Derbyshire. I believe the quarrel between Mr. Hume and J. J. Rousseau terminated by Rousseau's earning for himself public contempt, and Mr. Hume's gaining the respect he deserves.

Jean-Jacques' logic seemed to me most amusing

—he tried to prove that Mr. Hume had been his benefactor out of spite: he brought against him three arguments, which he calls *three slaps on his protector's cheeks.* If the King of England had given him a pension, the fourth slap would doubtless have been for his Majesty. The man seems to me completely mad. There are several like him at Geneva. They are more dismal there than they are in England: and I believe, in proportion to the population, there are more suicides in Geneva than in London. Not that suicide always comes from madness. There are said to be occasions when a wise man takes that course: but, generally speaking, it is not in an access of reasonableness that people kill themselves.

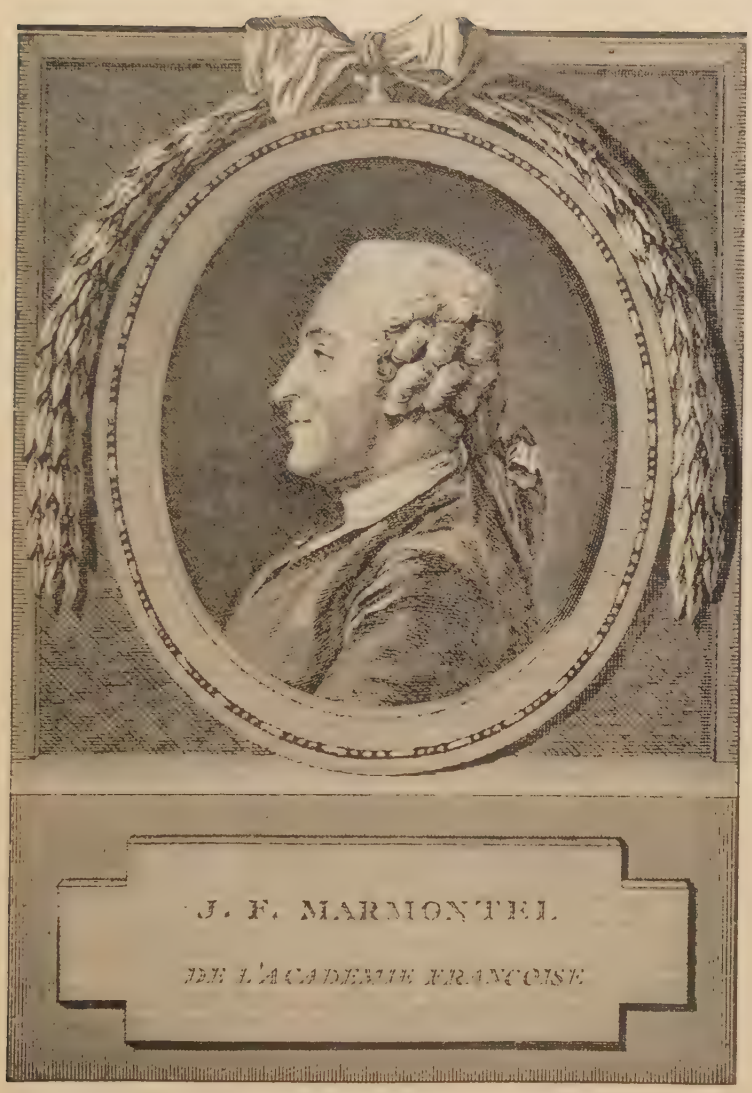
If you see Mr. Franklin, I pray you, sir, be so good as to give him my remembrances and my respects. With the same, I have the honour to be, sir, yours, etc., etc.

LXV

ON THE JESUITS AND CATHERINE THE GREAT

To Mme. du Deffand

[*"I find myself exposed to all the plagues of war . . . for some time I was exposed to famine."*



MARMONTEL, AUTHOR OF "BÉLISAIRE" AND THE "CONTES MORAUX."

From the portrait by Cochin

The disputes in the Genevan republic between the governing class and the *bourgeoisie* had risen to such a height by the beginning of 1767 that France, (asked by Voltaire himself, acting as mediator,) had quartered troops along the Lake of Geneva, to bring the republic to its senses by famine and blockade. For a while Ferney itself could with difficulty procure the necessaries of life.

"*The fifteenth chapter of 'Bélisaire,'*" by Marmontel (see Letter XXXIV, "The Favour of Kings").

"*I must humbly present you with my folly, 'The Scythians'*"—a play of Voltaire's which Paris had received in the March of this year 1767 with loud disapproval.

"*The Jesuits . . . have succeeded in getting themselves turned out of three kingdoms*"—Portugal, France, and Spain.

"*The Semiramis of the North*"—Catherine the Great of Russia, who had begun a correspondence with Voltaire in 1765. The "*trifle about a husband*"—the "*family affairs*" with which Voltaire proposed not to concern himself—were the strong suspicions under which Catherine laboured of having poisoned the Emperor Peter in 1763. If she was a great criminal, it was not the less true that she was a woman of the highest mental capacity, and a great and enlightened ruler. She and Voltaire

never met in the flesh: but in 1770 she helped him by ordering watches from his colony of watchmakers at Ferney, with a munificence perfectly royal: after his death, she bought his library and pensioned Wagnière, his secretary, for life.

"*A little book about Catherine*"—this was *The Letter on Panegyrics* which Voltaire had written a month earlier, under a pseudonym, as he often did. It contains much agile flattery of Catherine, based on a substratum of truth.]

May 18, 1767.

For more than six weeks, madam, I have been waiting to write to you, to get news of your health, to ask you how both you and President Hénault are supporting existence, and to exchange views with you on the deceits of the world; but I find myself exposed to all the plagues of war and of snow thirty feet deep. Snow and ice deprive me of my eyesight for four months every year; I am then, as you know, your contemporary of eighty: only the eighties do not suffer, and I suffer acutely. In the spring I am born anew, and pass from Siberia to Naples without change of place: such is my destiny.

Forgive my having been so long a time without writing to you: you know the strength of my attachment to you. You may indeed say, "Show

your faith by your works: you would write if you were really so fond of me." That is very true: but to write agreeably, mind and body must be at ease, and mine are far from it. You tell me you are bored; I reply that I am driven wild. Such is life—either insipid or painful.

When I say I am driven wild, that is a slight exaggeration: I mean, I have enough to drive me wild. The troubles of Geneva have upset all my plans: for some time I was exposed to famine: only pestilence was lacking: but an inflammation in my eyes did duty for that. I am now rousing myself by acting a comedy. I play an old man's part very fairly and most naturally, and as I dictate this letter I am trying on my stage dress.

You have doubtless had read to you the fifteenth chapter of *Bélisaire:* it is the best of the whole book, or I am much mistaken. But were you not astonished at the decision of the Sorbonne which condemned this proposition: "Truth radiates light from itself—men are never enlightened by the flames of the stake"? If the Sorbonne is right, the only apostles are the executioners.

I cannot conceive how anybody can put forward an idea so silly and abominable. I do not know how it is that communities say and do things so much more outrageously stupid than individuals: unless it is that an individual is responsible to

everybody and communities to nobody. Each member lays the blame on his colleague.

À propos of follies, I must humbly present you with *my* folly, *The Scythians*, of which a new edition is now appearing, and I beg you to criticise it, always provided you have it read to you by someone who understands how to read verse: an accomplishment as rare as to write it—well.

Of all the gigantic follies I have seen in my life, I know none to equal that of the Jesuits. They pass for being astute politicians, and have succeeded in getting themselves turned out of three kingdoms—just to make a beginning. You see, they are far from deserving their reputation.

I know a woman who is making herself a great one: that is the Semiramis of the North, who is sending fifty thousand men to Poland to establish there tolerance and liberty of conscience. This is unique in the history of the world, and, I answer for it, will go far. I may boast, to you, that I am rather in her good graces: I am her defender through all and in spite of all. I know very well she is blamed for some trifle about a husband: but those are family affairs with which I do not concern myself: and, besides, it is no bad thing to have a failing to counteract, for that implies great efforts to gain the public respect and admiration, and, assuredly, her scoundrel of a spouse would not have

accomplished any one of the great things which my Catherine does every day.

I long, madam, to relieve your boredom by the present of a little book about Catherine—pray God, it may not bore you further! I suppose women are not displeased at their sex being praised and considered capable of great things. You will have heard that she is about to make the tour of her vast empire. She has promised to write to me from the remotest confines of Asia. . . .

Goodbye, madam. Were I in Paris I should prefer your society to any to be found in either Asia or Europe.

LXVI

ON SHAKESPEARE

To Mr. Horace Walpole

[*Horace Walpole*, virtuoso and letter-writer, was the third son of the great Sir Robert. Voltaire, who declared Horace to be the best Frenchman ever born on English soil, knew him through their mutual friendship for Mme. du Deffand.

"*Your History of Richard III*" was Walpole's *Historic Doubts on Richard III* wherein the author had done his best to whitewash the king's character.

"*Your novel*" was the famous ghost-story,

The Castle of Otranto, which successfully froze the blood of our grandparents and leaves ours perfectly unchilled.

"*I was the first writer who made Shakespeare known to the French.*" In the *English Letters*, written during his visit to England in 1727–8, Voltaire had introduced Shakespeare to the French people, and shown him to be "an amazing genius" full of "force and fecundity, nature and sublimity," though sadly lacking indeed polish, finish, culture, that vague quality called taste, and having a deplorable readiness to drop into buffoonery and to set the unities at naught. Twenty years later, in 1748, he had penned a famous and malicious critique on *Hamlet*, admitting indeed in the play "sublime touches worthy of the loftiest genius," but dubbing its author a "drunken savage" all the same. Twenty years later still, in this letter of 1768, he reiterates the opinion he had expressed in the *English Letters*—a criticism perfectly characteristic of the critic, himself too great a genius not to recognise a Shakespeare's, and yet so typically an eighteenth-century Frenchman that he must needs bow at the shrine of that neatness, exactness, regularity, which hampered so much of the talent of his age. In a letter to Mme. du Deffand, Horace Walpole took exception—not to say the strongest objection—to these remarks of Voltaire's.

In 1776, when Voltaire was eighty-two, he replied in a rage, and a letter to the French Academy, to a French translation by Letourneur of the great William, wherein Letourneur had dared to call Shakespeare the "god of the theatre," and to ignore altogether Corneille and Racine (to say nothing of the author of *Zaïre*). But, not the less, the Voltaire who in his old age attacked Shakespeare as an "indecent buffoon" who had "ruined the taste of England for two hundred years," was he who had introduced him to the people of France, and whose real unbiassed opinion is that set forth in this letter to Horace Walpole.

The clowning and buffoonery to which Voltaire objects are now, of course, recognised to be very often not Shakespeare at all: or if Shakespeare, Shakespeare stooping to the bad public taste of his age.

"*Fontenelle*" (see Letter XLVII, "On Inoculation").

"*Our 'Mère Sotte,'*" by Pierre Gringore, a sixteenth-century writer, is said to be in its sub-title, a collection of the "oddities of men and women" collected by the Mère Sotte.

"*The Misanthrope*" . . ."*Georges Dandin*"—comedies by Molière.

"*Don Japhet d'Arménie*" and "*Jodelet*"—comedies by Scarron.

The "*Siège de Calais*"—a bad tragedy by Belloy. "*Cinna*," "*Athalie*," "*Iphigènie*"—*Cinna* by Corneille; *Athalie* and *Iphigènie* by Racine.]

FERNEY, July 15, 1768.

Sir, I have not ventured to speak English for forty years, and you are perfectly at home in our language. I have seen letters from you, written as naturally as you think. Moreover, my age and my state of health do not allow me to write with my own hand. So you must accept my thanks in my own tongue.

I have just read the preface of your *History of Richard III* and found it all too short. When an author is so visibly in the right, and has in addition a philosophy so bold and a style so virile, I want more of him. Your father was a great statesman and a good orator, but I doubt if he could have written as you write. *You* cannot say, "My father is greater than I."

I have always agreed with you, sir, that ancient histories are untrustworthy. Fontenelle, the only man of the time of Louis XIV who was at once poet, philosopher, and scholar, declared that they were undoubtedly fabrications; and it must be admitted that Rollin has amassed many absurdities and contradictions.

After I had read the preface to your history,

I read that to your novel. You laugh a little at me therein: the French quite understand raillery: but I am going to answer you in all seriousness.

You have nearly succeeded in making your countrymen believe that I despise Shakespeare. I was the first writer who made Shakespeare known to the French: forty years ago I translated passages from his works, as from Milton's, Waller's, Rochester's, Dryden's, and Pope's. I can assure you that before my time no one in France knew anything about English poetry: and had hardly ever heard of Locke. I have been persecuted for thirty years by shoals of fanatics for having said that Locke is the Hercules of metaphysics and that he defined the limits of the human understanding.

Fate willed that I should be the first to explain to my fellow-countrymen the discoveries of the great Newton, which many people among us still speak of as *the systems*. I have been your apostle and your martyr: truly, it is not fair that the English should complain of me.

I said, long ago, that if Shakespeare had lived in the time of Addison he would have added to his genius the elegance and purity which make Addison admirable. I stated that *his genius was his own, and his faults the faults of his age*. He is precisely, to my mind, like Lope de Vega, the Spaniard, and like Calderon. His is a fine but untutored

nature: he has neither regularity, nor propriety, nor art: in the midst of his sublimity he sometimes descends to grossness, and in the most impressive scenes to buffoonery: his tragedy is chaos, illuminated by a hundred shafts of light.

The Italians, who revived tragedy a century before the English and the Spanish, have not fallen into this fault: they have imitated the Greeks much better. There are no buffoons in *Œdipus* and the *Electra* of Sophocles. I strongly suspect that this grossness had its origin in our court fools. We were all a little uncivilised on this side of the Alps. Each prince had his regularly appointed jester. Ignorant kings, brought up by the ignorant, cannot know the noble pleasures of the mind: they degrade human nature to the point of paying people to talk nonsense to them. Thence comes it we have our *Mère Sotte:* and, before Molière, there was a court fool in nearly all comedies: an abominable custom.

I have, sir, it is true, said, just as you state, that there are serious comedies such as the *Misanthrope* which are masterpieces: that there are others which are very amusing, such as *Georges Dandin:* that drollery, gravity, pathos, may very well find place in the same comedy. I said that all styles were good, save the style which bores. Yes, sir, but grossness is not a style at all. In

my father's house are many mansions: but I never pretended that it was reasonable to lodge in the same room Charles V and Don Japhet of Armenia, Augustus and a drunken sailor, Marcus Aurelius and a street mountebank. It seems to me that Horace so thought, in the noblest of all ages: consult his *Ars Poetica.* All enlightened Europe thinks the same to-day: and the Spanish are beginning to get rid of bad taste as well as the Inquisition—good sense proscribing the one as much as the other. . . .

You free Britons, you do not observe the *unities of time, place, and action.* Truly, you do not improve matters: probability ought to count for something. It makes art more difficult: and every description of difficulty, vanquished, is a legitimate source of pride and satisfaction.

You must allow me, Englishman as you are, to plead the cause of my own nation. I so often tell it unpalatable truths, that it is only just I should stroke it when I think it is in the right. Yes, sir, I have always believed, I now believe, and I always shall believe, that Paris is very superior to Athens in the matter of tragedies and comedies. Molière, and even Regnard, seem to me to excel Aristophanes as much as Demosthenes excels our orators. I say boldly that I think all the Greek tragedies seem to me the work of school-

boys as compared with the sublime scenes of Corneille and the perfect tragedies of Racine. Admirer of the ancients as he was, Boileau himself thought this. He had no compunction in inscribing beneath the portrait of Racine that that great man had surpassed Euripides and equalled Corneille.

Yes, I believe I can prove that there are more men of taste in Paris than in Athens. We have more than thirty thousand souls in Paris who delight in the fine arts, and Athens had not ten thousand; the lower orders of the Athenians frequented theatres only when a performance was given gratis on some great, or trivial, occasion. Our constant dealings with women have given us much greater delicacy of feeling, much more propriety of manners, and much more nicety of taste. Leave us our theatre, leave the Italians their *favole boscareccie;* you are rich enough in other respects.

It is true that very bad pieces, absurdly intricate and barbarously written, have had, for a time, prodigious success in Paris, helped by a clique, party spirit, fashion, and the careless patronage of well-known persons. That is a passing madness; in a very few years the illusion fades. *Don Japhet d'Arménie* and *Jodelet* are relegated to the populace, and the *Siège de Calais* has no longer any repute outside Calais.

I must add one word on the rhyme with which you reproach me. Nearly all Dryden's pieces are in rhyme: which added to the difficulty of his task. The best remembered lines he ever wrote and the most widely quoted are rhymed: and I maintain again that, *Cinna*, *Athalie*, *Iphigènie* being in verse, any one who tried to shake off this yoke would, in France, be considered a weakling who had not the strength to support it.

In my rôle of garrulous old man I will tell you an anecdote. I asked Pope one day why Milton had not versified his poem when all other poets versified theirs, in imitation of the Italians; he answered: "*Because he could not.*"

I have confessed, sir, all that was in my heart. I own that I was much in the wrong in not paying attention to the fact that the Count of Leicester was first called Dudley: but if the fancy takes you to enter the House of Lords and change your name, I shall always remember the name of Walpole with the profoundest esteem.

Before despatching this letter, I have found time, sir, to read your *Richard III*. You would be an excellent attorney-general. You weigh all the pros and cons: still, I think I detect that you have a secret liking for the hunchback. You cannot help wishing he had been a pretty fellow, if not a fine fellow.

Calmet, the Benedictine, wrote a long dissertation to prove that Christ had a beautiful countenance. I wish I could agree with you that Richard III was neither so ugly nor so wicked as he is said to have been: but I should not have cared to have had anything to do with him. Your *white rose* and your *red rose* were full of fearful thorns for the nation.

Those gracious kings are all a pack of rogues.

Truly, the history of the Yorkists and Lancastrians, and many others, is much like reading the history of highway robbers.

Yours, with respects, etc.

LXVII

ON THE ADVANTAGES OF BEING A BRUTE

To the Comte de Schomberg

["*I have never had the honour of seeing Mme. Gargantua*"—this was the charming and fairy-like little Duchesse de Choiseul, the wife of the head of the French ministry. By 1769 Voltaire had established the silk-weaving industry at Fer-

ney, and asked the Duchesse de Choiseul to advertise it by accepting the first pair of stockings made on his looms. In mistake, she sent him a pattern shoe much too large for her. Hence the reference to "Mme. Gargantua" and the very misleading shoe which "proclaimed" her to be "one of the largest women in the world."

"*The* [*East*] *Indian Company . . . are now paying dearly for the blood of Lally* (see Letter LXXXIV, "The Last Letter").

"*I always have a feverish attack about the 24th of that month* [*August*] *and about May 14th.*" The dates, respectively, of the Massacre of St. Bartholomew and the murder of Henri IV by Ravaillac.]

August 31, 1769.

Yes, sir, it is true that I have been very ill. But that is the common lot of old age, especially when one has always had a feeble constitution: and these little warnings are the stroke of the clock to tell us that soon we shall have passed beyond time. Animals have a great advantage over human beings: they never hear the clock strike, however intelligent they may be: they die without having any notion of death: they have no theologians to instruct them on the Four Ends of animals: their last moments are not disturbed

by unwelcome and often objectionable ceremonies: it costs them nothing to be buried: no one goes to law over their wills: but in one respect we are greatly their superior—they only know the ties of habit, and we know friendship. Even spaniels, which have the reputation of being the most faithful friends in the world, do not approach us.

You, sir, make me enjoy this consolation to its fullest extent.

I have never had the honour of seeing Mme. Gargantua: the only thing I know about her is a shoe which proclaims her to be one of the largest women in the world: but I have seen letters of hers which make me believe that she has a wit even more delicate than her feet are enormous. . . .

The [East] Indian Company, of whom you tell me, are now paying dearly for the blood of Lally: but who will pay for the blood of the Chevalier de la Barre?

Do not be astonished, sir, that I have been ill in the month of August. I always have a feverish attack about the 24th of that month, as about May 14th. *You* will easily guess why, for your ancestors were so deeply attached to Henri IV. The thought of you and your visit are balm to my wounds. Keep a kindly recollection of me: I shall deeply value it.

LXVIII

THE CASE OF MARTIN

To M. d'Alembert

[To Voltaire's account of the *Case of Martin* nothing need be added, save that such miscarriages of justice—and they were many—he never passed by on the other side.

"*I have enough to do with the Sirven family*" (see Letter LXII, "The Case of Calas and of the Sirvens").

"*The sentence of the Chevalier de la Barre has been condemned as an atrocity*" (see Letter LXIII, "The Chevalier de la Barre").

September 4, 1769.

Martin was an agriculturist, with a large family, settled at Bleurville, in Barrois, on a farm of the Marche. Two years eight months ago a man was assassinated on the highroad near the village of Bleurville. Some sharp person, having noticed on that same road, between Martin's house and the place where the murder was committed, the impress of a shoe, Martin was arrested, and his shoes fitting more or less into the prints, he was interrogated.

After this preliminary, a witness came forward

who had seen the murderer fleeing: Martin was confronted with the witness, who said he did not recognise him as the murderer: whereon Martin cried: "Thank God! Here is one person who says he does not recognise me!"

The judge, being very weak in his logic, thus interpreted the words: "Thank God! I have committed the murder, and have not been identified by the witness."

This judge, assisted by several local barristers, condemned Martin to the wheel, on an equivocal meaning. The case is sent up to La Tournelle of Paris: and the sentence being confirmed, Martin is executed in his own village. When he was stretched out on St. Andrew's cross, he asked permission of the sheriff's officer and the executioner to raise his arms to call heaven to witness to his innocence, as he could not make himself heard by the crowd. He was allowed that favour: after which, his arms, thighs, and legs were broken, and he was left to die on the wheel.

On the 26th July of this year, a scoundrel, who was executed in the neighbourhood, solemnly declared before he died that it was he who had committed the murder for which Martin had been broken on the wheel. However, notwithstanding, the little property of this innocent father of a family is confiscated and dissipated: the family

was dispersed three years ago, and very likely does not even know that the father's innocence has at last been acknowledged.

This comes from Neufchâteau in Lorraine: two consecutive letters have confirmed the news.

What should I do, my dear philosopher? *Villars ne peut pas être partout.* I can only lift my hands to heaven, like Martin, and take God to witness all the horrors which happen in His Work of Creation. I have enough to do with the Sirven family —the daughters are still in my neighbourhood. I have sent the father to Toulouse: his innocence is as clearly demonstrated as a proposition of Euclid. The crass ignorance of a village doctor, and the still grosser ignorance of a subordinate judge, added to the grossness of fanaticism, has ruined a whole family, made them wanderers for six years, destitute, and begging their bread.

Finally, I trust that the Parliament of Toulouse will make it its honour and duty to show Europe that it is not always led away by appearances, and is worthy of the work it has to do. This affair gives me more trouble and anxiety than an old invalid can well bear: but I shall never slacken my grip till I am dead—I am so pigheaded.

Happily, for about ten years now, the Parliament has appointed young men with much sense, well read, and thinking—as you do. . . .

I have just found among my papers a letter in Locke's handwriting, written just before his death to Lady Peterborough: it is pleasingly philosophical.

The Turks' affairs go ill. How I should like to see those scoundrels hunted out of the country of Pericles and Plato: it is true, they are not persecutors, but they are brutes. God defend us from both the one and the other! . . .

À propos, have you heard that the sentence of the Chevalier de la Barre has been condemned as an atrocity by four hundred Russian deputies appointed to frame a legal code? I believe that it will be spoken of in that code as an instance of the most horrible barbarity, and that it will be long cited throughout Europe to the eternal shame of our nation.

LXIX

ON A STATUE BY PIGALLE

To Mme. Necker

[In 1770 a group of Voltaire's friends, headed by Mme. Necker—once the beloved of Gibbon, and now the wife of the Genevan banker who was to become Controller-General of France—proposed to erect, by public subscription, a statue

of the Patriarch of Ferney, now seventy-six years old. The famous sculptor Pigalle undertook the work, which was not successful. Voltaire's boyish delight in the compliment peeps through the self-depreciation of the following letters.]

May 21, 1770.

My just modesty, madam, and my good sense made me at first think the scheme of a statue was only a joke: but, since the thing is serious, allow me to discuss it seriously with you.

I am seventy-six years old and scarcely recovered from a severe illness, which for six weeks has dealt very hardly with both my body and my soul. M. Pigalle is supposed to be coming to model my face: but, madam, I must first have a face: you would hardly be able to guess where it ought to be. My eyes have sunk three inches, my cheeks are nothing but old parchment badly glued on to bones which have nothing to hold to. The few teeth I had have departed. This is not mere coquetry: it is the literal fact. M. Pigalle will think he is being made game of; and, from my own point of view, really I have too much vanity ever to appear before him. I should advise him, if he really wants to see this extraordinary venture through, to take, more or less, as his model the little Sèvres china bust. After all, what does it

matter to posterity if a block of marble resembles one man or another? I am perfectly philosophic on the subject. But, as I am still more grateful than philosophic, I give you, over what remains to me of a body, the same power that you have over what remains to me of a soul. Both are in a bad way: but my heart is as much yours, madam, as if I were five and twenty, and my respect for you is as sincere. My duty to M. Necker.

LXX

ON THE SAME SUBJECT

To Mme. Necker

FERNEY, July 19, 1770.

When the villagers here saw Pigalle getting out some of the tools of his craft, "Come along!" they cried, "he is going to be dissected; that will be great fun!" Any sort of show, as you know, madam, amuses people: they are equally ready to go to the marionettes, the fire at Saint-Jean, the Opéra-Comique, High Mass, or a funeral. My statue will make a few philosophers laugh, and some rogue of a hypocrite or some scamp of a scribbler raise disapproving eyebrows: vanity of vanities!

But all is not vanity: my warm gratitude to

my friends, and to you above all, madam, is not vanity.

My respects to M. Necker.

LXXI

ON THE SOUL AND GOD

To Frederick William, Prince of Prussia

[Prince Frederick William was the nephew of Frederick the Great and succeeded him on the throne of Prussia in 1786.

"*The System of Nature*"—the famous work by Baron d'Holbach (who long disavowed it) on the necessity of atheism. Voltaire pronounced it "a sin against nature": passionately refuted it in the article on "God" in his *Philosophical Dictionary:* and declared that it did untold harm to the philosophic party.

"*Si Dieu n'existait pas, il faudrait l'inventer*"—"If God did not exist, He would have had to be invented"—this famous line—one of the most famous in literature—is, of course, Voltaire's own. It occurs in his *Epistle to the Author of the Book of the Three Imposters*, and he often quotes it himself.]

FERNEY, November 28, 1770.

Monseigneur, the royal family of Prussia has excellent reasons for not wishing the annihilation of the soul. It has more right than anyone to immortality.

It is very true that we do not know any too well what the soul is: no one has ever seen it. All that we do know is that the eternal Lord of nature has given us the power of thinking, and of distinguishing virtue. It is not proved that this faculty survives our death: but the contrary is not proved either. It is possible, doubtless, that God has given thought to a particle to which, after we are no more, He will still give the power of thought: there is no inconsistency in this idea.

In the midst of all the doubts which we have discussed for four thousand years in four thousand ways, the safest course is to do nothing against one's conscience. With this secret, we can enjoy life and have nothing to fear from death.

There are some charlatans who admit no doubts. We know nothing of first principles. It is surely very presumptuous to define God, the angels, spirits, and to pretend to know precisely why God made the world, when we do not know why we can move our arms at our pleasure.

Doubt is not a pleasant condition, but certainty is an absurd one.

What is most repellent in the *System of Nature* —after the recipe to make eels from flour—is the audacity with which it decides that there is no God, without even having tried to prove the impossibility. There is some eloquence in the book: but much more rant, and no sort of proof. It is a pernicious work, alike for princes and people:

"Si Dieu n'existait pas, il faudrait l'inventer."

But all nature cries aloud that He does exist: that there *is* a supreme intelligence, an immense power, an admirable order, and everything teaches us our own dependence on it.

From the depth of our profound ignorance, let us do our best: this is what I think, and what I have always thought, amid all the misery and follies inseparable from seventy-seven years of life.

Your Royal Highness has a noble career before you. I wish you, and dare prophesy for you, a happiness worthy of yourself and of your heart. I knew you when you were a child, monseigneur: I visited you in your sick room when you had smallpox: I feared for your life. Your father honoured me with much goodness: you condescend to shower on me the same favours which are the honour of my old age, and the consolation of those sufferings which must shortly end it. I am, with deep respect, etc.

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LXXII

ON HAPPINESS IN OLD AGE

To Lord Chesterfield

[This was the great *Lord Chesterfield*, the friend of Pope, Swift, and Bolingbroke, and the author of the famous *Letters* to his natural son (see Letter LXXVI, "On Lord Chesterfield's Letters," and Letter LXXVII, "On the same Subject").

During Voltaire's visit to England in 1726–7 he had dined with Lord Chesterfield in London (and had been obliged to refuse a second invitation, as the vails expected by the servants were so high). In 1741, Lord Chesterfield had stayed with Voltaire in Brussels, and Voltaire had read aloud to him selections from his drama *Mahomet*, which Lord Chesterfield afterwards said he regarded as "a covert attack on Christianity." Lord Chesterfield had retired from public life on account of ill-health and deafness many years before this letter was written.

His "*desirable lot*" in the "*great lottery*" to which Voltaire refers, had included the posts of a privy counsellor, ambassador to the Hague, and lord-lieutenant of Ireland.

"*The fine house you have built yourself*" was Chesterfield House in South Audley Street, May-

fair. Lord Chesterfield said himself that "the only real comforts in the latter end of life" were "quiet, liberty, and health," so his views were in agreement with Voltaire's.]

FERNEY, September 24, 1771.

Lord Huntington tells me that, of the five senses common to us all, you have only lost one, and that you have a good digestion: that is well worth a pair of ears.

I, rather than you, should be the person to decide whether it is worse to be deaf or blind or to have a weak digestion. I can judge these three conditions from personal experience: only for a long time I have not dared to come to decisions on trifles, much less on subjects so important. I confine myself to the belief that, if you get the sun in the fine house you have built yourself, you will have very bearable moments. That is all that we can hope for at our ages, and, in fact, at any age. Cicero wrote a beautiful treatise on old age, but facts did not confirm his theories, and his last years were very miserable. You have lived longer and more happily than he did. You have not had to deal with perpetual dictators or triumvirs. Your lot has been, and is still, one of the most desirable in this great lottery, where the prizes are so rare, and the biggest one—lasting

happiness—has never yet been gained by anybody.

Your philosophy has never been misled by the wild dreams which have confused heads otherwise strong enough. You have never been, in any sort, either an impostor or the dupe of impostors, and I count that as one of the most uncommon advantages of this brief life.

LXXIII

ON NATURAL TALENT

To M. Diderot

[For *Diderot*, see Letter XXVII, "On the Blind."

"*I shall always regret having lived without seeing you.*" Voltaire saw Diderot in Paris, for the first and last time, five years later.

"*You send me the 'Fables' of one of your friends. . . . to whom nature has given, in place of inspiration, much good sense,*" etc., etc. The friend was M. Boisard, of the Literary Academy of Caen. Voltaire here forecasts Goethe's sentiment—"The older one grows, the more one prizes natural gifts, because by no possibility can they be procured and stuck on."

"*So much has been said of La Motte*"—La Motte Fouquet, the German romancer who wrote *Undine*

and who certainly cannot be compared with La Fontaine, whose *Fables* Mme. de Sévigné characterised as "divine": and which are indeed marked, as Voltaire declares, by a delicate and exquisite inspiration—'laissant tomber les fleurs et ne les semant pas."

"*The 'Armide' of Quinault.*" One of the famous rôles of Mdlle. Quinault, the actress. (See Letter XIX, "On a Quiet Life and a Fit of Discouragement.")]

FERNEY, April 20, 1773.

I was very pleasantly surprised, sir, to find a letter signed Diderot awaiting me when I had recrossed from one bank of Styx to the other.

Imagine the joy of an old soldier scarred with wounds on receiving a letter from M. de Turenne. Nature has granted me leave to stay on a little longer in this world—that is to say, to poise for just a moment between two eternities (as if there could possibly be two of them).

I shall therefore go on vegetating for a while at the foot of the Alps by the river of time, which sweeps away everything at last. My intellectual powers fade like a dream, but I shall always regret having lived without seeing you.

You send me the *Fables*, written by one of your friends. If he is young, I answer for it he will go far: if he is not, it may be said of him that

he writes with wit what he has originated with talent: so much has been said of La Motte. Who would think there could be any higher praise? but there is that accorded to La Fontaine: *he wrote perfectly spontaneously*. In all the arts there is a something exceedingly difficult to come by. All the philosophers of the world, melted down together, would not have succeeded in portraying the *Armide* of Quinault, nor the *Les Animaux Malades de la Peste* which La Fontaine wrote, without knowing what he did, almost unconsciously. Let us confess that in works of genius everything is the result of instinct. Corneille wrote the scene of Horace and Curiace as a bird makes its nest, which a bird always does well—that not being at all the case with our wretched talents. M. Boisard seems to me a very pretty bird of Parnassus, to whom nature has given, in place of the instincts of genius, much good sense, truth, and acuteness. I enclose a letter of thanks to him. The after-effects of my illness, from which I still suffer, do not permit me to write at length. Be sure that I shall look on you, till I die, as a man who has had the courage to be useful to the thankless, and who deserves the commendation of all wise men—I regard and esteem you as if I were myself a wise man.

THE OLD INVALID OF FERNEY.

LXXIV

ON A WISE APPOINTMENT

To M. Turgot

[Just a week before this letter was written, *Turgot*, one of the wisest and greatest of the statesmen of France, was appointed Minister of Marine by the young King Louis XVI. A month later he was made Controller General of Finance. Honest, enlightened, and disinterested, he was also the friend of the philosophers, and had pleaded in the Calas case on the side of tolerance. In this, and the following letter, Voltaire expresses opinions of him which time and history have ratified. Two years later, in 1776, he was dismissed from his high office by the frivolous Queen: the abuses he had abolished were re-established: France went her lighthearted way to ruin: and old Voltaire at Ferney wrote that this was death before death, and that a thunderbolt had fallen on his head and his heart. When he was on his last visit to Paris in 1778 he went to see Turgot. "Let me kiss the hand," says old Voltaire, "which signed the salvation of the people."

"*M. de Condorcet.*" See Letter LXXV, "On Turgot and Ferney."]

FERNEY, July 28, 1774.

M. de Condorcet tells me that he was never really happy until the day M. Turgot was made Secretary of State.

And I, too, sir, am grieved to be so near death now that I see virtue and reason in their rightful place. You will be overwhelmed with heartfelt congratulations—and you will be one of the very few who has ever received them. Far be it from me to ask you to reply to me: but while I chant a *De Profundis* with my failing breath for myself, I sing aloud *Te Deum laudamus* for you.

The happy old dying invalid of Ferney,

LXXV

ON TURGOT AND FERNEY

To M. le Marquis de Condorcet

[*The Marquis de Condorcet*, the Aristocrat of the philosophic party, who poisoned himself to escape the guillotine, had been made in 1773, Perpetual Secretary of the Academy of Sciences. In 1770 he had stayed at Ferney with d'Alembert—to whom Voltaire alludes in this letter as "M. Bertrand"—one of d'Alembert's pen-names. Voltaire had the greatest admiration for the modest

and disinterested character of the young marquis —Condorcet was twenty-seven at the date of the visit to Ferney—as well as for his splendid intellectual gifts and his noble ideals. "You will see great days," the old patriarch wrote to him: "you will make them."

"*Ferney has become . . . a pretty considerable place . . . not unworthy the attention of the Ministry.*" By 1770 Voltaire had added watch-making to the silk-weaving industry he had established at Ferney (see Letter LXVII, "On the Advantages of being a Brute"). The quarrels of Geneva (which France had only made worse by "mediation" in the form of an armed force—see Letter LXV, "On the Jesuits and Catherine the Great") threatening the existence of the watch-makers there, Voltaire had bidden them welcome at Ferney: and presently built "*the large and lofty stone houses*" he here alludes to for their benefit. He had not only, as he says, "*never asked the government for money*" for the scheme, but had most liberally expended his own. He succeeded in obtaining for his colonists their exemption from a pitiless tax which extorted from the poverty-stricken province of Gex alone forty thousand livres annually. All the same, after his death, Ferney did in a measure relapse into the "*nothingness whence* " he "*drew it*," and its industries de-

clined: and "Ferney-Voltaire" is now only a straggling suburb of Geneva, with Voltaire's charmingly situated house and grounds and the church he built perpetual objects of interest, for the memories which cling to them.]

FERNEY, August 12, 1774.

I shall not write to you to-day, Mr. Secretary, on either arts or sciences, which are beginning to be much indebted to you, nor on liberty of conscience, of which people have tried to rob the arts which cannot exist without it.

You filled my heart with a holy joy when you told me that the King replied to the malcontent who told him that M. Turgot was an Encyclopædist. "He is an honest and an enlightened man: that suffices me." Did you ever know before kings and sensible men to be of the same mind?

Do you know, and does M. Bertrand know, that the poet Kien-long, Emperor of China, said as much a few years ago? Did you read in the thirty-second miscellany of (so-called) *Curious and Edifying Letters* the letter of a fool of a Jesuit called Benoît to a rogue of a Jesuit called Dugad? It is there stated in so many words that a Minister of State accusing a mandarin of being a Christian, the Emperor Kien-long asked: "Does his pro-

vince complain of him?"—"No."—"Does he render justice impartially?"—"Yes."—"Has he failed in his duty towards the state?"—"No."—"Is he a good father to his family?"—"Yes."—"Why then dismiss him for a mere nothing?"

If you see M. Turgot, tell him this anecdote.

I send you a copy of a petition I have jotted down for all the ministers. The only one I have not sent it to is the King. I am exceedingly anxious that this petition should be presented to the Chamber of Commerce, where M. Turgot may have the casting vote. I have at least the consolation that, in spite of such shining lights as Fréron, Clément, and Sabotier, Ferney has become, since you saw it, a pretty considerable place, which is not unworthy the attention of the ministry. It contains not only fairly large and lofty stone houses for the manufacturers, but pretty little country seats which would be an ornament to Saint-Cloud or Meudon. It will all relapse into the nothingness whence I drew it, if the ministry abandons us. I am perhaps the only founder of a manufactory who has never asked the government for money. Now, I only ask it to attend to its own interests. I appoint you and M. Bertrand the judges of the case.

I should much like to consult you both on an affair which would interest you much more, and

on which I am about to embark—I appeal to God and to yourselves to help its success. It concerns our good cause: so I can count on your aid. My respects to you both.

V.

LXXVI

ON LORD CHESTERFIELD'S LETTERS

To Mme. du Deffand

[These famous Letters of *Lord Chesterfield* (see Letter LXXII, "On Happiness in Old Age") to his son Philip Stanhope are the embodiment of worldliness expressed with an exquisite elegance. If they were, as Voltaire here calls them, "the best educational manual that has ever appeared," they failed signally in their chief aim—to make Philip an agreeable person: though they left him an honest man. It was his widow who, shortly after Lord Chesterfield's death in 1773, sold the Letters to a publisher—the relatives vainly trying to stop the publication. Either with or without a permit, a French translation of them *did* appear in Paris a year after Voltaire wrote this letter.

"*The great Moncrief, who found out how to please an august Queen of France.*" Moncrief wrote *Essays on the Art and Necessity of Being Pleasant,*

and the "august Queen" was Marie Leczinska, Queen of France—from whose privy purse (when she was a young bride at the French Court) Voltaire had received a pension.

"*Verses . . . with which Louis XVI is deluged*" —on his accession, which had taken place three months earlier, in May, 1774.

"*The Duc de Choiseul*"—the French minister, and an old friend of Voltaire's. The Duc had helped him in the affair of Calas and had protected his colony of watchmakers and weavers at Ferney. His wife was the airy, fairy little Duchess—the dear "grandmère" of Mme. du Deffand, who had coquetted with Voltaire over the first pair of silk stockings woven in the Ferney looms (see Letter LXVII, "On the Advantages of Being a Brute"). Since then, in 1770, Choiseul had been disgraced and exiled through the machinations of Mme. Dubarry, the royal mistress; and Voltaire had considerably offended him by embracing the policy of his supplanter, Maupeou.]

August 12, 1774.

. . . I much wish someone would translate at once and well, for your amusement, the two large volumes of *The Letters of Lord Chesterfield to his Son, Philip Stanhope*. They mention a number of people you used to know. There is much

to be learnt from them: I am not sure they do not form the best educational manual that has ever appeared. They describe all the courts of Europe. Lord Chesterfield tries to make his son an agreeable person, and shows him the means to become so—and his are better means than those of the great Moncrief, who found out how to please an august Queen of France.

Save for the admission that he knew how to make himself pleasant, Lord Chesterfield has nothing good to say about Marshal Richelieu. He advises his son to become the lover of Mme. du P. . ., and sends him a model of a declaration of love.

I am much afraid that the book will be translated by some clerk in the shop of your friend Fréron, or some other bookseller's hack.

A man of the world ought to take the trouble to translate it: but its publication in France would never be permitted. If I were in Paris I would read you some of the letters in French—with the English original before me: but my state of health does not permit me to come to Paris: and besides, I have had the audacity to found a sort of little town in my wilds, and to establish manufactories here which demand my presence and my constant attention. My works in the country are chains I cannot break. I follow my ploughs in my

carriage: my labourers only ask that I should keep well, with my wits about me, and write them verses to put in the *Mercure*.

It seems to me that when Louis XIV took the reins of government he had better verses addressed to him than those with which Louis XVI is deluged. I sincerely pity him if he is obliged to read them.

You are sure to know, madam, if the Duc de Choiseul has really bought the post of High Chamberlain from the Duc de Bouillon. It would be a good thing indeed that a man of such loftiness of character should be perpetually bound to the Court by some high office. I must end, having no more paper. My tenderest respects.

LXXVII

ON THE SAME SUBJECT

To Frederick the Great

[Since their rupture in 1753, Frederick and Voltaire had corresponded; sometimes with the old warmth and fervour; sometimes coldly and politely; and once, for four years, not at all. Both knew if they met they would quarrel again: they feared and distrusted each other; and yet

sometimes, as this letter shows, yearned for each other like estranged lovers.]

August 16, 1774.

. . . A collection of the late Lord Chesterfield's Letters has appeared, addressed to a natural son to whom he was as much attached as Mme. de Sévigné to her daughter.

These letters very often speak of you: and do you the full justice which posterity will also render you.

The approval of Lord Chesterfield has very great weight, not only because he belongs to a nation who hardly ever flatters even kings, but because he is perhaps the most graceful of English writers. His admiration for you is above suspicion: he had no idea that his Letters would be published after his death and after that of his son. They are being translated into French in Holland: so your Majesty will soon see them. You will read the only Englishman who ever advocated the art of pleasing as the first duty in life.

I never forget that my dearest wish was once to please you: it is now not to displease you. Everything grows feeble with age: the more one realises one's shortcomings, the more modest one grows.

Your old admirer.

LXXVIII

A PLEA FOR THE POOR

To M. de Fargès

[*M. de Fargès* was a Councillor of State.

Voltaire gives here an admirable description of the condition of the country poor before the Revolution, and as in the sarcastic letter to M. de Bastide (Letter LIX, "Social Conditions in 1760"), emphasises the fact that it was not the iniquitous extortion of the taxes which so much oppressed them but the cruel and rapacious character of the tax-gatherers. Gabelle, or the tax on salt, to which Voltaire alludes here, compelled each person to buy seven pounds of salt per year at a price which varied in the different provinces and was everywhere iniquitously high. The nobles, clergy, and government officials were exempt from the tax altogether. No wonder in a very few years' time the Gabelle was as a fuse to the fire of the Great Revolution.]

FERNEY, February 25, 1776.

Sir, since thou wouldest enter into judgment with thy servant, permit me to tell you that, if I could leave my bed (being now in my eighty-third year and the victim of many maladies), I should

hasten to throw myself at the feet of the Controller General: and this is how I should prose on the subject of our states:

Our little country is worse than Sologne and the miserable land of Champagne, and worse than the worst parts of Bordeaux.

Notwithstanding our wretchedness, eight and twenty parishes sang eight and twenty Te Deums and shouted eight and twenty "Long live the Kings and Long live M. Turgots!" We shall cheerfully pay thirty thousand francs to the sixty sub-kings—being delighted to die of hunger, on condition of being delivered from seventy-eight rogues who made us die of rage.

We agree with you that near Paris, Milan, and Naples the land can support all the taxes, because the land is productive: but it is not the same with us: in good years the yield is three to one, often two, sometimes nothing, and needs six oxen to plough it. Seeds are fruitful once only in ten years.

You will ask what we live on: I answer, On black bread and potatoes, and principally on the sale of the wood which our peasants cut in the forests and take to Geneva. Even this means of subsistence constantly fails, for the forests are devastated here much more than in the rest of the kingdom.

I may remark, in passing, that timber will soon be scarce in France, and that lately wood for firing is being bought in Prussia.

As I want to be perfectly frank, I own that we make certain cheeses on some of the Jura mountains in June, July, and August.

Our chief means of livelihood is at the end of our fingers. Our peasants, having nothing to live on, have been diligently working at watchmaking for the Genevese—the Genevese making thereat ten millions of francs per annum, and paying the workmen of the province of Gex exceedingly badly.

An old man, who took it into his head to settle between Switzerland and Geneva, has established a watch manufactory in the province of Gex which pays the workmen of the country exceedingly well, which increases the population, and which, if protected by the Government, will supersede the business of wealthy Geneva: but this old man is not much longer for this world.

We exist, then, solely through our industry. But I ask if this watchmaking, which will bring in ten thousand francs a year, which profits by salt much more than do the agriculturists, cannot help these agriculturists with the thirty thousand francs indemnity they must pay for their salt?

I ask if these fat inn-keepers, who make even more than the watchmakers, and consume more

salt, ought not also to assist the unfortunate proprietors of a wretched soil?

The big manufacturers, the hotel-keepers, the butchers, the bakers, the tradesmen, know so well the miserable condition of the country and the favours of the ministry that they have all offered to help us with a small contribution.

Either permit this contribution, or slightly reduce the exorbitant sum of thirty thousand livres which the sixty deputy-kings demand from us.

One of these sub-kings named Basemont has just died, worth, it is said, eighteen millions [of francs]. Was there any need for that scamp to flay us alive in order that our skin might bring him five hundred livres?

Here, sir, are a few of the grievances which I should lay at the feet of the Controller General: but I say nothing, I leave all to you. If you are moved by my reasonings you will deign to be so good as to present them: if they strike you as bad, you will whistle them down the wind.

If I do wrong to plead thus feebly for my country, I am undoubtedly right in saying that I have the greatest esteem for your enlightenment, the greatest gratitude for your kindnesses, and that I am, with the sincerest respects, yours, sir, etc., etc.

LXXIX

ON THE TIMES OF LOUIS XIV

To the Baron de Faugères

[*The Baron de Faugères* was a naval officer.

"*Castel suggests an ocular harpsichord.*" Castel was a French mathematician who experimented in natural philosophy. In his book called *Optique des Couleurs* or Treatise on the Melody of Colours, which he produced in 1740, he had tried to illustrate his subject by the *clavecin oculaire* or ocular harpsichord.

"*Needham fancies he can produce eels out of a little soup.*" Needham was an English eighteenth century scientist and a friend of Buffon. Like Castel, he was a Jesuit—which may account for some of Voltaire's contempt for their theories. Needham's—"that animals are brought to life from putridity"—is certainly not so ridiculous as Voltaire supposed it. Needham wrote in a most involved and confusing style, which would be particularly objectionable to Voltaire's lucid mind.

"*The great epoch in which the brutes, our ancestors, developed into men.*" It is certainly something of an anomaly to find a Voltaire laughing, in advance, at the Darwinian theory.]

May 3, 1776.

You suggest, sir, that round the statue raised at Montpellier—*To Louis XIV, after his death*—monuments should be erected to those great men who were the glory of his age.

This project is the more commendable because for many years there seems to have been a sort of cabal among us to depreciate everything which made that splendid epoch renowned. People are weary of the masterpieces of the last century. They try to belittle Louis XIV and reproach him for his desire for fame. The nation in general prefers Henri IV to the exclusion of all other kings: I do not ask if this is from justice or from inconstancy—if, being better informed, we know more of the truth to-day than we did formerly. I merely remark that we do not in the slightest degree realise or feel the grandeur of the times which succeeded the age of Henri IV.

"They have not understood me," said that good Prince to the Duc de Sully. "But they will regret me." And, indeed, sir, to speak plainly, he was much hated and little respected. Fanaticism, which persecuted him from his cradle, conspired a hundred times against his life, and finally snatched it from him by the hand of an ex-monk—a madman, maddened by the madness of the League. We now make him honourable amends:

we prefer him above all our kings, although we kept, and kept for a long time, many of the bigotries which inspired the assassination of our hero.

But if Henri IV was great, not so his age in any way. I am not speaking of the innumerable crimes and infamies with which superstition and rebellion defiled France. I allude only to the arts whose glory you seek to perpetuate. They were either ignored or very ill carried on—beginning with the art of war. It was waged for forty years without a single man gaining the reputation of a clever general—without one whom posterity can compare with a Prince of Parma or a Prince of Orange. As for the navy, you, sir, who are yourself one of its ornaments, must know that it had practically no existence. The arts of peace, which make the charm of society, which beautify our towns, which enlighten our minds and soften our manners, were perfectly unknown to us, and only came into existence in the age which saw the birth and death of Louis XIV.

I find it difficult to understand the dead set which is made upon Colbert's memory to-day—Colbert, who contributed so much to the welfare of the navy which is so close to your heart. You are well aware, sir, that he was the creator of that navy which became so formidable. Two years previous to his death, France had one hundred

and eighty ships of war and thirty galleys. Manufactures, commerce, trade—in both east and west—were all due to him. It is possible to surpass him, but never to eclipse him.

It is just the same in the arts of the mind—oratory, poetry, philosophy—and in the arts where the mind directs the hand—architecture, painting, sculpture, mechanics. The men who adorned the age of Louis XIV by such talents as these will never be forgotten, whatever be the merit of their successors. The forerunners in a career will always remain at the head of their fellows in the eyes of posterity. As Newton said in his dispute with Leibnitz, all the honour is the inventor's: and he was right. A Pascal must be regarded as an originator, for he started a new species of eloquence: a Pelisson, for he defended Fouquet in the same way as Cicero defended King Deiotarus before Cæsar: a Corneille, for he created French tragedy even though he copied the Spanish *Cid:* a Molière, for he originated and perfected comedy: a Descartes, for he would have perfected geometry had he not wandered in his inventions from his model: while had Malebranche only known how to curb his imagination, what a man among men he would have been!

Everyone agrees that this great century was the age of genius, but so often, after the originators,

come—I do not say disciples taught in the school of their masters, for they are laudable—but apes who try to spoil the work of their inimitable leaders. Thus, after Newton discovered the nature of light, Castel, to outdo him, suggests an ocular harpsichord.

No sooner has a new world in miniature been discovered by the microscope, than a Needham fancies he can produce eels out of a little soup or out of a drop of water boiled with wheat ears in it. Animals and vegetables being thus brought into being without seed, this crowning absurdity is called the sublime achievement of natural history.

No sooner has the real philosopher calculated the effect of sun and moon on the tides, than romancers, inferior to Cyrano de Bergerac, write the history of the time when the seas covered the Alps and the Caucasus, and when the universe was only peopled by fish. They end by discovering that very remarkable epoch in which the brutes, our ancestors, developed into men, and their forked tails turned into thighs and legs. This is the great service which Telliamed has recently rendered to humankind. Thus, sir, in all the arts and in all the professions, impostors succeed the genuine discoverers: heaven grant that all the charlatans we have to do with may be as harmless!

Success to your project! May all the men of genius who adorned the time of Louis XIV reappear in the square at Montpellier, round that king's statue, and inspire the ages to come to an eternal emulation!

LXXX

ON MONARCHY AND DESPOTISM

To M. Gin

[*M. Gin* had sent Voltaire his book, *The True Principles of French Government as shown by Reason and Facts.*

The "*Esprit des Lois*" (see Letter LVI, "A Profession of Faith," in which Voltaire also alludes to Montesquieu's inaccuracy, which was notorious).

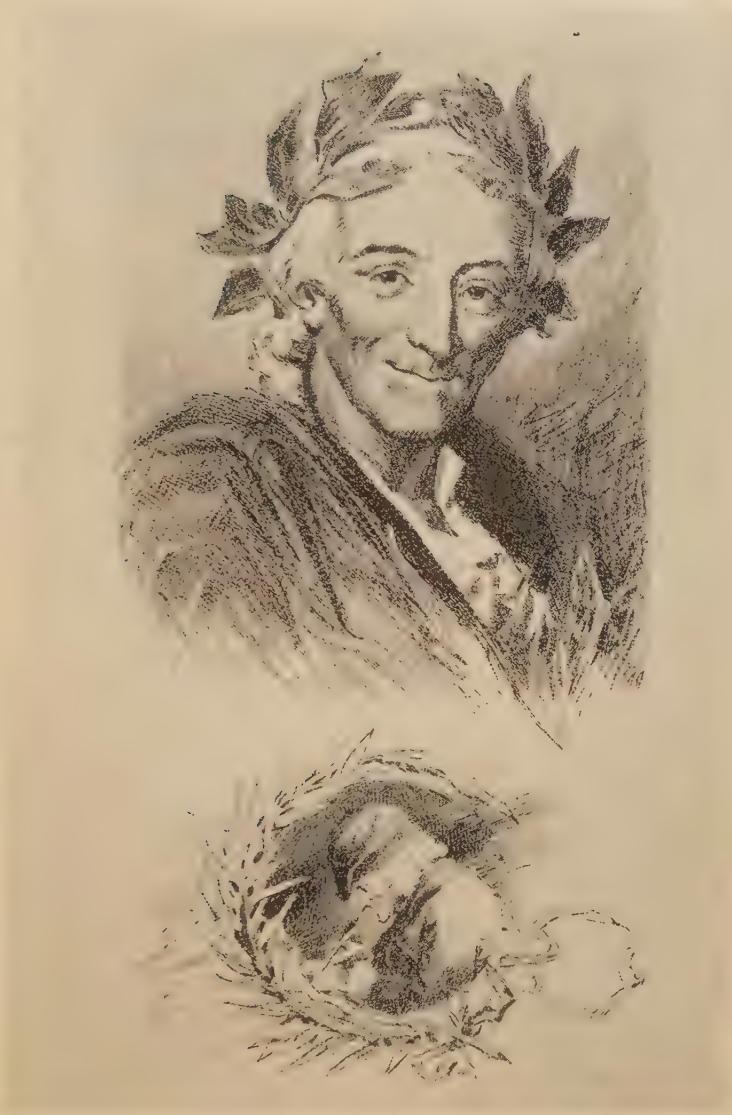
"*The President Montesquieu*" (see Letter XXV, "On Corneille and Racine"). He was President of the Parliament of Bordeaux.]

FERNEY, June 20, 1777

Omitting, sir, the compliments and thanks I owe you, I begin by assuring you that *despotic* and *monarchical* are the same thing in the hearts of all sensible people. Despot (*herus*) means *master*, and *monarch* means *sole master*, which is very

much stronger. A fly is monarch of the imperceptible animalculæ which it devours: the spider is the monarch of flies, for it ensnares and eats them: the swallow rules the spiders: shrikes devour the swallows: and so on indefinitely. You will not deny that the farmers-general devour us: you know the world has been so made since the beginning. But that does not prevent your being most clearly in the right as opposed to the Abbé Mably, and I return you, sir, therefore a thousand thanksgivings. You arrive at the happy conclusion that monarchical government is the best of all; always provided that Marcus Aurelius is the monarch: for, otherwise, what can it matter to a man if he is devoured by a lion or by a tribe of rats? You appear, sir, to be of the opinion of the *Esprit des Lois* in granting that the principle of monarchies is *honour*, and the principle of republics *virtue*. If you were not of this opinion, I should be of the Duc d'Orléans' (the Régent's), who said of one of our great lords: "He is the most perfect courtier—he has neither humour nor honour": and I should tell President Montesquieu, if he hopes to prove his thesis by saying that under a monarchy men seek honours, that they seek them much more in republics. In them, they strive for the honour of ovation, triumph, and all the dignities. The office of doge

at Venice is sought after, though this indeed is *vanitas vanitatum.* For the rest, sir, you are much more methodical than that *Esprit des Lois* and you never misquote as he does—a most important point: for if you verify Montesquieu's quotations you will hardly find four that are correct; I once had the pleasure of testing them. I am much edified, sir, by your discretion in stopping at the reign of Henri IV: all you say affords me information: and I take the liberty of divining much that you do not say. Above all, I am grateful to you for your way of thinking and of expressing yourself on the barbarous method of government called feudal: it is brought to perfection, it is said, at the diet of Ratisbon: it is abhorred half a mile from me here, to my right and to my left; but, by one of our French anomalies, it exists in all its horrors just behind my kitchen garden, in the valleys of Mount Jura; and twelve thousand slaves of the canons of Saint Claud, who have had the insolence to desire to be subjects of the king instead of serfs and beasts of burden to the monks, have just lost their suit to the Parliament of Besançon, while many councillors of the Grand Chambre have lands where the mortmain is in full vigour, in spite of the edicts of our kings: so uniform is jurisprudence amongst us! Finally, your book instructs and cheers me: I love its



VOLTAIRE AS AN OLD MAN

From the portrait by Schoff

method and style. You do not write to parade your wit, as does the author of the *Esprit des Lois* and the *Lettres Persanes:* you use your wits to discover the truth. Judge then, sir, of my indebtedness to you for the honour you have done me in sending me your work: judge if I have read it with pleasure and if I am merely employing an empty formula when I assure you that I have the honour to be, with the deepest esteem and the most heartfelt gratitude, etc., etc.

LXXXI

A DYING TESTIMONY

To the Abbé Gaultier

[In 1778, Voltaire, being now in his eighty-fourth year, decided, against the advice of his best friends, to leave Ferney on a visit to Paris. He was overwhelmed with homage and attentions—in one day alone he received three hundred visitors. By Sunday, February 15th, he was too ill to leave the house. On that day, as recorded in this letter, *Benjamin Franklin*—the American statesman, philosopher, diplomatist, now seventy-two years old, and in Paris on a diplomatic mission to secure foreign assistance for America in the war she was then waging with Great Britain—brought his

grandson to receive the patriarch's blessing. (Franklin's efforts had been so far successful that on February 6, 1778,—a week or two before this letter was written,—Louis XVI had signed a treaty of alliance with the United States—see Letter LXXXII, "Paris: 1778.") It is said that Voltaire and Franklin talked of the government and constitution of that free country. "If I were forty," said Voltaire, "I should go and settle in your happy fatherland."

On February 20th Voltaire received a letter from the Jesuit *Abbé Gaultier*, who was anxious for the salvation of the sceptic's soul and that he himself should have the prestige of saving it. To this letter Voltaire made the following reply, and on February 21st accorded Gaultier a long interview, in which he accepted the abbé as his confessor—since to ensure decent and Christian burial a confessor was a necessary evil—and promised to see him again. Gaultier played no insignificant part in the extraordinary scenes which took place round Voltaire's deathbed: and in the struggle for his conversion showed more mercy and moderation than some of his brethren.]

PARIS, February 21, 1778.

Your letter, sir, seems to me to be that of an honest man: that is sufficient to determine me to

receive the honour of a visit from you on the day and at the hour most convenient to you. I shall say to you exactly what I said when I gave my blessing to the grandson of the wise and famous Franklin, the most honoured of American citizens: I spoke only these words, "*God and liberty.*" All present were greatly moved. I flatter myself that you share these aspirations.

I am eighty-four years of age: I am about to appear before God, the Creator of all the universe. If you have anything to say to me, it will be my duty and privilege to receive you, despite the sufferings which overwhelm me.

I have the honour to be, etc.,

VOLTAIRE.

LXXXII

PARIS: 1778

To the Marquis de Florian at Bijou-Ferney

[*The Marquis de Florian* was the second husband of Voltaire's niece, Mme. de Fontaine. After her death in 1772 he had married a pretty little Protestant whom he had met at Voltaire's home: and the couple had taken up their abode at a little house near Ferney.

"*Half dead this last fortnight since his accident.*" On February 25th Voltaire had broken a blood-vessel and had been alarmingly ill.

"*You know there has been much talk of war*" —against England, France having pledged herself to intervene as the ally of America (see Letter LXXXI, "A Dying Testimony").

"*Necker's lottery tickets.*" Necker was Director General of the disastrous finances of France.]

PARIS, March 15, 1778.

The old invalid has been unable to write sooner to M. and Mme. de Florian. He has been half dead this last fortnight since his accident; and he has had to endure all the miseries inevitable to such a condition. He seizes a moment when he is somewhat easier to tell M. and Mme. de Florian that if he had quite died it would have been with the warmest affection for them and trusting them not to forget him.

You know there has been much talk of war in Paris: that the King has declared, through his Ambassador in London, that he desires peace, but that he must insist on his flag and commerce being respected. The treaty with the Americans is made public. I saw M. Franklin at my own house, as I was too ill to visit him: he asked me to give my blessing to his grandson. I gave it,

saying only "*God and liberty*"—in the presence of twenty people who were in my room.

The English Ambassador came about an hour later. The kindness I have received both from the Court and from the city has been far above my hopes, and even my wishes: but I have not found the time a favourable one to ask for pecuniary help for my colony. The King is too deeply in debt. The fleet has cost an immense sum. Eighty out of a thousand of Necker's lottery tickets are worthless. There is no longer any question of economy—only a desire for vengeance. M. d'Estaing is in command of a formidable squadron, and M. de la Motte-Piquet of another.

You know that M. Dupuits is at Paris, and hopes to find a post. It is quite possible that without any declaration of war some shots will be exchanged. For my part—who am perfectly pacific—I only expect to be done to death by the poltroons who are always prating to me of Shakespeare, Vauxhall, Roast Beef, English mountebanks, and English lords.

I beg M. de Florian's pardon for entering into these details. I would much rather have had a road made outside his house: but I see it is easier to cure oneself of spitting blood than to get money out of an involved government which has not even the wherewithal to pay poor Racle. Here,

there is everywhere revolting luxury and frightful misery. Paris is the headquarters of all the follies, blunders, and horrors conceivable.

When shall I see Ferney again and embrace the master and mistress of Bijou!

LXXXIII

FAREWELL

To Frederick the Great

[This is the last letter of the long and famous correspondence between Frederick and Voltaire. Old Frederick, like young Frederick, could still take flattery in immense doses: and old Voltaire, like young Voltaire, does not scruple to administer them. But his last letter to "Frederick the Immortal" is, like his first, the letter of the man who more than any other of his generation loved that men should be enlightened, and had worked all his life that those "paid to blind them" should not always be able to "put out their eyes."]

PARIS, April 1, 1778.

Sire, the French gentleman who will present this letter to your Majesty, and who seems to be worthy of entering your presence, will tell you

that I have not had the honour of writing to you for so long a time because I have been engaged in avoiding two things which pursue me in Paris—excitement and death.

It is really amusing that at eighty-four years of age I should have been saved from two mortal maladies. My good fortune comes from being under your protection: I owe my reputation to you.

I have been the witness—with surprise and a deep satisfaction—at the performance of a new tragedy, of the public (who for thirty years regarded Constantine and Theodosius as models of princes and even of saints) rapturously applauding verses which proclaimed the two of them to be no better than superstitious tyrants. I have seen twenty similar proofs of the progress which philosophy has made at last in all ranks. I do not despair, in a month or two, of having a panegyric pronounced on the Emperor Julian; and assuredly, if the Parisians remember that he rendered justice among them like Cato, and that he fought for them like Cæsar, they should be eternally grateful to him.

It is then true, sire, that, finally, men will be enlightened, and that those paid to blind them will not always put out their eyes! Thanks for that to your Majesty. You have conquered bigotry

as you have conquered your foes: you can congratulate yourself on institutions of every kind. You are the vanquisher of superstition as you are the bulwark of Germanic liberty.

Outlive me to establish all the empires you have founded! May Frederick the Great be Frederick the Immortal!

Accept my unalterable devotion.

VOLTAIRE.

LXXXIV

THE LAST LETTER

To the Comte de Lally

[General Lally, the father of Lally-Tollendal, the man to whom this letter is addressed, was an Irish Jacobite who had plotted in France for the restoration of the Stuarts: and in India, unsuccessfully, against the British East India Company.

On his return to France, partly to punish him for his failure and partly to please England, the French Government threw him into the Bastille: absurdly charging him with having sold Pondicherry to his enemies, the English, and on many other counts, not less ridiculous. On May 6, 1766, being then sixty-four years old, he was gagged,

handcuffed, and beheaded. A month later, Voltaire was writing to d'Alembert, "I will stake my neck on it he was not a traitor." Seven years later Lally's son implored Voltaire's help to exculpate his father's memory, and for many weeks Voltaire was engaged "night and day" in writing *The Historical Fragments of the History of India and of General Lally* which ably and conclusively proved the wronged man's innocence.

On May 26, 1778, when old Voltaire was dying at the Hôtel Villette in Paris, Louis XVI in council publicly vindicated General Lally.

By a last mighty effort, the dying man recalled the splendid intellect, now waning fast, which had so nobly served him, and dictated the following letter to the Comte de Lally-Tollendal. Then he made someone write in a large hand on a sheet of paper, which he caused to be pinned to his bed hangings, the following words:

"On May 26th, the judicial murder committed by Pasquier (Councillor to the Parliament) upon the person of Lally was avenged by the Council of the King."

It was his last conscious act. He died four days later, on May 30, 1778. There have been few men with whom the ruling passion of hatred of tyranny, oppression, injustice, has been so strong in death: and better men, who, in their last hours

have found it impossible to think of any soul but their own.]

May 26, 1778.

The dying man returns to life on hearing this great news: he tenderly embraces M. de Lally: he sees that the King is the defender of justice: and he dies content.

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